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**THE INSURGENT STATE:
POLITICS AND COMMUNAL DISSENT IN IRAQ, 1919-1936**

Frederic M. Wehrey

**A THESIS
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ABSTRACT

This study examines selected instances of communal dissent among Iraq's Kurds, Assyrians, and Shi'is to uncover the impact of provincial insurgency on the formation of the Iraqi state from 1919 to 1936. Undertaken for economic, political and personal motives, armed dissent in the rural periphery presented a dire threat to the state-building efforts of the Hashimite monarchy and the Sunni elite. By demonstrating that the Iraqi government was incapable of policing its own territory, internal rebellions threatened to erode the state's autonomy from Britain. Moreover, successive revolts by the Kurds, Assyrians, and Shi'is challenged the state's monopolization of violence, the propagation of Iraqi Arabism as an official ideology, and the implementation of conscription as a vehicle for breaking down old loyalties to sect and tribe. Although the revolts themselves were ultimately unsuccessful in winning any substantial gains for the groups that undertook them, they affected a decisive shift in the political trajectory of the Iraqi state.

The waging of a counter-insurgency campaign by the Sunni elite, this study argues, became a sort of political theater—a strategy for ambitious politicians to amass power, garner prestige, and erode the position of their elite rivals. Embattled regimes used the specter of provincial dissent as an instrument to deflect criticism over their failings in other areas of administration and close ranks with their opponents in the name of “national unity.” More importantly, the ruthless suppression of rural unrest became a nationalist and anti-imperialist imperative; a means for the Sunni elite to extricate the young Iraqi army, and hence the nation, from British tutelage. By 1936, the primacy of counter-insurgency as an instrument of social control had paved the way for the entry of military officers into Iraqi politics—a watershed event that would have far-reaching and

detrimental effects on Iraq's future stability. The emergence of the army as the most powerful Iraqi institution, charged with the arbitration of intra-elite disputes and the extension of government discipline into the periphery, foreshadowed an enduring style of authoritarian politics that persists in the current regime.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract	iii
Acknowledgments	v
Introduction	1
Chapter One: Kurdish Dissent and the Iraqi State, 1919-1932	10
Chapter Two: The Assyrian Revolt of 1933	51
Chapter Three: The Shi‘i Uprisings of 1935-36	82
Conclusion	114
Annotated Bibliography	119

INTRODUCTION

A nation-state requires more than the submission of tribes to central authority; it requires national integration - Bassam Tibi¹

Memorandum from a King

In March 1933, less than six months after Iraq's formal independence from the British, the ailing King Faysal circulated a letter to his key ministers, in which, among other things, he wrote:

In my opinion, an Iraqi people does not yet exist; what we have is throngs of human beings lacking any national consciousness or sense of unity, immersed in religious superstition and traditions, receptive to evil, inclined toward anarchy and always prepared to rise up against any government whatsoever.²

His remarkable memorandum provides us with a frank, albeit biased, admission of the dilemmas of state-building in Iraq from the perspective of Baghdad's ruling elite.

Formed through the merging of the former Ottoman provinces of Basra, Baghdad and Mosul following World War I, the borders of the British mandate at the time of Faysal's coronation in 1921 embraced a vast swathe of mountainous territory in the north, connected tenuously by two ancient rivers to a desolate stretch of marshes and desert in the south. The sheer administrative difficulty of ruling such a landscape was compounded by the ethnic and religious heterogeneity of its inhabitants. Devoid of any

¹ Bassam Tibi, "The Simultaneity of the Unsimultaneous: Old Tribes and Imposed Nation-States in the Modern Middle East," in *Trbdes and State Formation in the Middle East*, eds. Philip S. Khoury and Joseph Kostiner (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 132.

² Faysal's Memorandum of 1933 is contained in 'Abd al-Razzaq al-Hasani, *Ta'rikh al-Wizarat al-'Iraqiyya* (Sidon: Matba'at al-Irfan, 1953-1965), Vol. 3, 286-283. A Translation appears in Ofra Bengio, "Faysal's Vision of Iraq," in Asher Susser and Aryeh Shmuelovitz, eds., *The Hashemites in the Modern Arab World* (London: Frank Cass, 1995), 143-149. The letter is incorrectly dated by Bengio as March 1932, instead of March 1933.

established tradition of statehood, the political and social order of the new entity was fractured along sectarian, linguistic, and social lines.³

The Kurds, Assyrians, and Shi‘is of the northern and southern provinces, beset with internal divisions themselves, confronted the political will of the Hashimite monarchy, the ex-Sharifian elite, and their British patrons, by pursuing varied strategies of accommodation and resistance.⁴ Traditional elites within each community were frequently co-opted into the ruling structure of the new state through financial and political enticements, yet armed insurgency remained the most prevalent expression of communal dissent from 1919 to 1936.⁵ While important as a mobilizing force, sectarian or ethnic identity itself was not the sole motivation for such disaffection. Instead, a

³ See Hanna Batatu’s chapter, “Of the Diversity of Iraqis, the Incohesiveness of their Society, and their Progress in the Monarchic Period Toward a Consolidated Political Structure,” in *The Old Social Classes and the Revolutionary Movements of Iraq: A Study of Iraq’s Old Landed and Commercial Classes and of its Communists, Ba‘thists, and Free Officers* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978), 13-36. Several scholars have argued that loyalties to tribe, village, sect, or locale were gradually eroded with the rise of Iraqi Arabism in the inter-war years and the developing market relations between urban centers and the countryside. Thus, “society began to become stratified into elementary forms of social classes, an uneven process but one which moved slowly towards the gradual crystallization of some form of nation-state.” See Peter Sluglett and Marion-Farouk Sluglett, “Sunnis and Shi‘is Revisited: Sectarianism and Ethnicity in Authoritarian Iraq,” in Derek Hopwood, Habib Ishow, and Thomas Koszinowski, eds., *Iraq: Power and Society* (Reading: Ithaca Press, 1993), 75. Others have argued that the policies of authoritarian regimes in the 1960s and 70s preserved the old loyalties, retarded the process of national integration, and forced many of these writers to revise their earlier assertions. Sami Zubaida, “Community, Class and Minorities in Iraqi Politics” in Robert A. Fernea and Wm. Roger Louis, eds., *The Iraqi Revolution of 1958: The Old Social Classes Revisited* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1991), 197-210.

⁴ While hardly homogenous in their origins, the ex-Sharifians were a group of approximately 640 predominantly Sunni Arab, Ottoman-trained officers and administrators who had served with the Sharif of Mecca’s Hejaz campaign during World War I or Faysal’s administration of Syria until 1920. Most importantly for this study, they occupied the highest posts in the Iraqi bureaucracy and military, and held similar views on nation-building in Iraq. The most powerful figures in this class can be divided very roughly into two factions: those under the leadership of Nuri al-Sa‘id who sought a cooperative relationship with Britain and another group under Yasin al-Hashimi, who adopted a more hardline, anti-imperialist position critical of Faysal. For a listing of the most prominent among these individuals see David Pool, “From Elite to Class: The Transformation of Iraqi Leadership, 1920-1939” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 12 (1980), 332-340. Reeva Simon, “The Education of an Iraqi Ottoman Army Officer,” in Rashid Khalidi, Lisa Anderson et al., eds., *The Origins of Arab Nationalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 151-161. Also, Hanna Batatu’s chapter on “The Crown and the Ex-Sharifians Officers” in *The Old Social Classes and the Revolutionary Movements of Iraq*, 319-361.

⁵ Following Sami Zubaida’s definition, I have employed “communal” to mean “social organization and solidarity on the basis of particularistic identification of tribe, village, religion, ethnicity or region.” Zubaida, 197.

myriad of economic, personal, political, and social factors were often at work—usually stemming from a collective sense of deprivation relative to other groups in the new order.⁶ The landed *shaykhs*, for instance, resentful of the state's intrusion into their sphere of control, used violence as a bargaining chip with the fragile new government. Having calculated that such measures might enhance their own political position, religious elites and the nascent intelligentsia within each community often lent these revolts a facade of proto-nationalist legitimacy through their petitions to the League of Nations and appeals for British protection.⁷ In other instances, fierce personal rivalries and contending networks of patronage lay at the heart of rebellions waged in the name of the broader Kurdish, Assyrian, or Shi'i communities.

Iraq's Insurgent Era

Regardless of motive, the spate of revolts undertaken by dissident sectarian and ethnic groups presented an almost existential threat to the rule of the Sunni elite for the first fifteen years of its existence.⁸ Through its bloody encounters with well-armed insurgents on the rural periphery, the ex-Sharifians were made painfully aware of the government's weakness and its dependence on British aid and supervision. Following the monarchy's formal independence, Faysal expressed his fear that the government, deprived of the critical support of the British Royal Air Force (RAF), could not survive the eruption of two simultaneous revolts in the north and the south. "I am not certain," he

⁶ For more on communal mobilization in a Middle Eastern context, see Milton J. Esman and Itamar Rabinovich, "The Study of Ethnic Politics in the Middle East," in Milton J. Esman and Itamar Rabinovich, eds., *Ethnicity, Pluralism and the State in the Middle East* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988), 3-24.

⁷ For a discussion of Iraq's minorities and the League of Nations, Kerim A. Attar, *The Minorities of Iraq During the Period of the Mandate, 1920-1932* (Columbia University, PhD Dissertation, 1967), 163-190.

⁸ A brief, yet scathing overview is presented in Elie Kedourie, "The Kingdom of Iraq: A Retrospect," in *The Chatham House Version and other Middle-Eastern Studies* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1984), 236-282.

wrote, “that six months after England has relinquished its responsibility in Iraq, we are able to stand on our own. The defense forces are still inadequate.”⁹ Such a dilemma threatened to perpetuate what historian Peter Sluglett has termed the “vicious cycle of dependence,” in which successive Iraqi governments during the mandate, despite their nationalist pretensions, were forced to rely upon British assistance to suppress the eruption of communal revolts.¹⁰

The quashing of internal dissent within the country’s borders thus became a nationalist imperative—a means to extricate the army, and hence the nation, from British tutelage. As the pivot of state-building in Iraq, the army was seen as the one institution that not only buttressed the minority rule of the Sunni elite, but acted as the guarantor of the state’s independence from Britain through the pacification of the countryside.¹¹ Given the insufficient reach of the center into the periphery during the early years of the monarchy, the army’s ruthless application of violence to one ethnic community was intended by the ex-Sharifians as a deterrent to others who were contemplating similar acts of resistance. Moreover, the ruling elite believed that the likelihood of provincial unrest could be averted through the application of universal conscription—a tool for instilling the virtues of patriotism and citizenship by breaking down old loyalties to sect and tribe.¹² Other important aspects of state-building, such as rural infrastructure,

⁹ Author’s translation from al-Hasani, “Mudhakkirat al-Malik Faysal,” *Ta’rikh al-Wizarat*, Vol. 3, 290. On the role of the RAF in propping up the monarchy, David Omissi, *Air Power and Colonial Control: The Royal Air Force, 1919-1939* (New York: Manchester University Press, 1990), 18-39.

¹⁰ Peter Sluglett, *Britain in Iraq 1914-1932* (London: Ithaca Press, 1976), 91.

¹¹ Major works on the Iraqi army include, Mohammad A. Tarbush, *The Role of the Military in Politics: A Case Study of Iraq to 1941* (London: Kegan Paul, 1982); Paul Hemphill, “The Formation of the Iraqi Army,” in Abbas Kelidar, ed., *The Integration of Modern Iraq* (London: Croom Helm, 1979), 88-110. For the army’s relationship with British authority, Raja’ Husayn al-Khattab, *Ta’sis al-jaysh al-Iraqi wa-Tatawwur Dawrihi al-Siyasi min 1921-1941* (Baghdad: Jami‘at Baghdad, 1979), 137-194.

¹² Al-Hasani, “Siyasat Idā‘af al-Jaysh,” *Ta’rikh al-Wizarat*, Vol. 6, 169-171 and Reeva Simon, “The Imposition of Nationalism on a Non-Nation-State: The Case of Iraq During the Interwar Period,

provincial education, and health care--measures that might have addressed the roots of communal dissent--were accorded tertiary importance.¹³ In Faysal's view, "It would be sheer folly for Iraq to undertake large scale projects and reforms before it is strong enough to protect them."¹⁴

Beyond its impact on center/periphery relations and Iraq's dependence on Britain, the suppression of communal unrest played a critical role in shaping the outcome of intra-elite rivalries. The waging of a counter-insurgency campaign against the Kurds, Assyrians, or Shi 'is became a sort of political theater—a strategy for ambitious personalities within the ex-Sharifian ranks to amass power, garner prestige, and erode the position of their opponents. During the mandate, for instance, the nationalist ex-Sharifians frequently accused British political officers of inciting communal unrest, particularly in the north, as a strategy for maintaining Britain's grip on the country.¹⁵ By linking ethnic rights to British meddling in state affairs, these figures created a political climate in Baghdad that made it difficult for any politician to advocate publicly concessions to the Kurds, Shi 'is, or Assyrians. In such an atmosphere, the issue of *ta'ifiyya*, or sectarianism, became a litmus test for national loyalty—and a political

1921-1941," in James Jankowski and Israel Gershoni, eds., *Rethinking Nationalism in the Arab Middle East* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 94-95.

¹³ Peter Sluglett has argued that monarchy's reliance upon British airpower dissuaded it from investigating the root causes of provincial unrest. Sluglett, 268-269.

¹⁴ Bengio, 147. In this sense, the flawed concept of the nation-state articulated by Faysal and the ruling ex-Sharifians--with its narrow emphasis on the state's monopoly on violence, internal pacification, and administrative control--closely parallels definitions offered by theorists such as Max Weber, Charles Tilly, and Anthony Giddens. Anthony D. Smith, *Nationalism and Modernism: A Critical Survey of Recent Theories of Nations and Nationalism* (London: Routledge, 1998), 70-76 and Anthony Giddens, *The Nation-State and Violence* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 18, 120.

¹⁵ For examples, 'Abd al-Razzaq al-Hasani, *Ta'rikh al-'Iraq al-Siyasi al-Hadith* (Sidon: Matba'at al-Irfan, 1946), 284; by the same author, "Al-Mu'amara 'ala Salamat al-Dawla," *Ta'rikh al-Wizarat*, Vol. 3, 122-128.

weapon in the hands of those politicians with the most anti-imperialist posture.¹⁶ Finally, successive Iraq governments used the specter of provincial dissent as an instrument to mollify opposition parties, close ranks with other ethnic groups, and deflect criticism over their failings in other areas of administration.

Goals and Structure of the Study

Surprisingly, the profound effects of provincial uprisings on the political development of Iraq have received scant attention in most studies of the period. Although they are treated extensively in the histories of particular communities, few attempts have been made to address their ramifications on the formation of the Iraqi state itself.¹⁷ This study, therefore, seeks to trace the political trajectory of Iraq from 1919 to 1936 by exploring the strategies of resistance pursued by its dissident Kurdish, Shi‘i, and Assyrian communities, as well as Baghdad’s response. Specifically, it will examine the impact of communal dissent in Iraq’s peripheral territories on the state’s relationship with

¹⁶ See the commentary on “sectarianism” in northern Iraq in the memoirs of the Iraqi minister of the interior, ‘Abd al-‘Aziz al-Qassab, *Min Dhikriyati*, (Beirut: Manshurat ‘Uwaydat, 1962), 273-4; Kedourie’s discussion of “Husrism,” in “The Kingdom of Iraq: A Retrospect,” 274. This pattern in Iraqi politics has persisted up to the present regime. See Ofra Bengio’s discussion of *ta’ifiyya*, *shu‘ubiyya*, and *iqlimiyya* in *Saddam’s Word: Political Discourse in Iraq* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 100-108 and Ferida Jawad, “The Triumph of Arabism: The Shu‘ubiyyah Controversy and the National Identity of Modern Iraq,” *Jusur: The UCLA Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 13 (1997), 53-87.

¹⁷ Peter Sluglett and Marion Farouk-Sluglett, “The Historiography of Modern Iraq,” *American Historical Review* 96 (December 1991), 1408-1421. Notable exceptions are Elie Kedourie’s brief essay, “The Kingdom of Iraq: A Retrospect;” Zubaida, “Community, Class and Minorities in Iraqi Politics;” and Phebe Marr, *Yasin al-Hashimi: The Rise and Fall of a Nationalist*. (Harvard University, PhD dissertation, 1966). Batatu’s work employs a class analysis and rarely accords agency to ethnic or religious grievances. Moreover, a discussion of British rule is largely absent. Charles Tripp argues that the provincial rebellions formed a “backdrop” for elite rivalries, yet does not sufficiently explore their impact on the state’s relations with the British. Charles Tripp, *A History of Iraq* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 30-107. Significant works on the Kurds during the mandate include, Wadie Jwaideh, *The Kurdish Nationalist Movement: Its Origins and Development* (Syracuse University, PhD dissertation, 1960); David McDowell’s chapter on “The Kurds, Britain, and Iraq,” in *A Modern History of the Kurds* (London: IB Tauris, 1996), 151-181; Othman Ali, *British Policy and the Kurdish Question in Iraq, 1918-1932* (University of Toronto, PhD Dissertation, 1992). For the Assyrians, Khaldun S. Husry, “The Assyrian Affair of 1933,” *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 5 (1974), 161-176/344-360 and R.S. Stafford, *The Tragedy of the Assyrians* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1935). On the Shi‘is, Yitzhak Nakash, *The Shi‘is of Iraq* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 109-125.

Britain, the jockeying for privilege and power among the ruling ex-Sharifians, the formation of Iraqi Arabism as an official ideology, and the entry of military officers into politics. Much of Iraq's subsequent history in the pre-revolutionary period, I will argue, becomes more intelligible if placed in the context of the early insurrections that rattled the foundations of the new state. By attaching primacy to armed dissent on the periphery, I contend that the real locus of Iraq's political development was not the meeting halls and royal chambers of Baghdad, but the mountains of Mosul and the marshes of Diwaniyya.

Chapter One will examine Kurdish dissent from 1919 to 1932 in the context of British imperial control and a rising trend of Iraqi Arabism within the ex-Sharifian ranks. In particular, it will discuss how British subsidies to Kurdish tribal chiefs, originally intended as a strategy for wresting control of the Mosul province from Turkey, impacted relations between Baghdad and the Kurds. At a time when the ex-Sharifians were attempting to expand the Iraqi army, consolidate their hold over the valuable northern province, and demand the removal of the British air bases, agitation by the Kurds proved tremendously threatening. As the termination of the mandate approached, successive revolts by the Kurdish leader Shaykh Mahmud seemed to provide a pretext for a continued British presence in the country, on the grounds that Iraq was incapable of policing its own territory.

Moreover, demands by the British for cultural and educational concessions to the Kurds came at a time when an ex-Sharifian faction under the leadership of Yasin al-Hashimi and Sati' al-Husri was attempting to challenge British control and propagate Iraqi Arabism as a state ideology. I will argue that the government's avoidance of any

meaningful concessions to the Kurds and its military suppression of the Kurdish revolts must be seen as part of its struggle for independence from Britain.

In Chapter Two, I will consider how the suppression of an attempted mutiny by Iraq's small, yet significant Assyrian minority became a strategy for an ex-Sharifian faction to consolidate its rule and deliver a blow to British influence in the country. By soliciting British patronage and serving as armed auxiliary troops in the service of British rule, the Assyrian community exposed itself to fierce criticism from the nationalist ex-Sharifians. The ruthlessness with which the Iraqi army carried out its campaign against the Assyrians was intended as both an anti-imperialist statement directed at Britain and a display of strength by the newly-independent government. Most importantly, I contend that the Assyrian massacre of 1933 was a critical step in the rise of the military in Iraqi politics.

Chapter Three analyzes the most significant instance of armed dissent by the Shi'i community, the revolts of 1935-6, as vehicle through which a Sunni, ex-Sharifian faction was able to seize power. Following Iraq's independence and Britain's departure, a powerful circle of Sunni opposition politicians co-opted disgruntled Shi'i tribal *shaykhs* and religious leaders in a plot to overthrow the government. Such a strategy threw the country into its worst period of internal unrest since 1920, yet yielded few benefits for any segment of the Shi'is. Instead, the Shi'i revolts demonstrated the utility of ethnic disaffection as a political weapon in the hands of opposition politicians. Ultimately, I will examine how they paved the way for a period of authoritarian rule under Yasin al-Hashimi, followed by the entry of military officers into Iraqi politics in 1936. In this sense, the suppression of the Shi'i revolts completed the process of state-formation

addressed throughout the study: the steady erosion of British influence, the punishment of ethnic dissent through military force, the continued political marginalization of the provinces, and the triumph of the army as the most powerful Iraqi institution and self-proclaimed arbiter of intra-elite disputes.

The meeting of provincial dissent through force alone, I conclude, may have secured the fragile state a measure of autonomy from Britain. Yet by failing to address the fundamental inequalities of political power and the underlying economic and social roots of communal violence, the government's iron-fisted policies perpetuated the structural weaknesses of the state. More importantly, counter-insurgency brought to power the officer corps, whose rival networks of political patronage would plunge Iraq into a new era of coup and counter-coup.

Through an analysis of this turbulent era, we may begin to discern the roots of Iraq's current dilemmas and, more specifically, the strategies of discipline and coercion pursued by the regime of Saddam Husayn.

CHAPTER ONE

Kurdish Dissent and the Iraqi State, 1919-32

Introduction

On 21 January 1926, three days after the ratification of a new Anglo-Iraq Treaty, the Iraqi prime minister, ‘Abd al-Muhsin al-Sa‘dun, delivered a remarkable speech before the Iraqi Chamber of Deputies:

Gentlemen, it will be impossible for this nation to exist unless all sections of the Iraqi people are given their rights...We all know what disaster the Turks created by the alienation of the rights of these people and the prevention of their progress. We should give the Kurds their rights. Their officials should be from among them: their tongue should be their official language and their children should learn their own tongue in the schools.¹

Less than a month later, al-Sa‘dun resigned from office under pressure from a powerful bloc of ex-Sharifian officers who condemned his demand for linguistic concessions to the Kurds as a betrayal of the pan-Arab foundations of Iraq and a threat to its very survival. The opposition press subsequently attacked his concern for Kurdish cultural autonomy as part of a larger British plot to dismember the state.²

The fall from power of ‘Abd al-Muhsin al-Sa‘dun was but one episode in a larger struggle during the mandate period—a cultural, political, and military contest over the integration of the country’s Kurdish population. Most studies of the Iraqi Kurds under the mandate focus solely on Britain’s betrayal of its promises for an independent Kurdish state, placing the Kurdish question in the context of a great power struggle following World War I. Little attention has been paid to how the specter of Kurdish dissent was

¹ Quoted in Secretariat for H.E. the High Commissioner for Iraq, Baghdad, Intelligence Report (Secret), 4 February 1926 in Robert Jarman, ed. *Political Diaries of the Arab World: Iraq*, Vol. 4 (Oxford: Archive Editions, 1998), 215. Al-Sa‘dun, unlike most other holders of high office under the monarchy, did not serve with Faysal or the Sharif of Mecca during World War I. Rather, he descended from a landed Sunni family from al-Muntafiq and was trained in Ottoman civilian institutions.

² Secretariat for H.E. the High Commissioner in Iraq, Baghdad, Intelligence Report (Secret), 4 February 1926 in Ibid., 220.

perceived in Baghdad, its relationship to the development of Iraqi Arabism as a state ideology, or how Kurdish demands for cultural autonomy became one of the primary arenas of contention between the ex-Sharifians and their British overlords.³

Since the establishment of the British mandate in 1919 until its termination in 1932, the Iraqi monarchy wrestled with the challenge of building a viable state from disparate elements within an artificially imposed border, while at the same time managing its delicate relationship with Britain. Forced to concede that he derived much of his authority from his British advisors and the military power they commanded, King Faysal nevertheless actively encouraged the development of Iraqi Arabism as both a vehicle for state-building and a critique of British hegemony.⁴ As advanced by its chief ideologue, Sati‘ al-Husri, Arabism became the paramount ideology that legitimated the rule of ex-Sharifians and informed the development of Iraq’s educational system and army. Such an exclusivist vision for Iraq, although successful in bolstering the power of the ex-Sharifian class, left little political space for expressions of Kurdish identity.⁵

Political mobilization among the Kurds--whether in the form of tribal resistance to centralization or more nationalist expressions of dissent by the nascent Kurdish intelligentsia--explicitly undermined the Arabist ideal. It seemed to offer a rival blueprint for the new country, one based upon a recognition of linguistic and religious plurality rather than the forcible imposition of Arabism through education and conscription. At a time when both identities and borders were fragile and negotiable, the proponents of Iraqi

³ See Jwaideh, op. cit.; McDowell, op. cit., 151-181; Ali, op. cit.

⁴ Nur Masalha, “Faisal’s Pan-Arabism, 1921-1933,” *Middle Eastern Studies* 27:4 (1991), 679-693. Also, Phebe Marr, “The Development of a Nationalist Ideology in Iraq, 1920-1941,” *Muslim World* 75 (April 1985), 85-101 and Batatu, 326-327. These studies, by and large, do not address the reception of Iraqi Arabism by the Kurdish population.

⁵ Simon, “The Imposition of Nationalism on a Non-Nation State: The Case of Iraq During the Interwar Period, 1921-1941,” 87-104.

Arabism argued that any concessions to the Kurds--however limited in scope--would threaten the viability of the state by encouraging its fragmentation along sectarian lines and lead, ultimately, to the loss of the valuable Mosul province.⁶

Aside from the territorial and ideological dangers of Kurdish dissent, it is important to also consider how demands for Kurdish autonomy in Iraq became inextricably tied to the anti-imperial struggle. Iraqi nationalists argued, often justifiably, that British political officers actively nurtured Kurdish particularism, if not nationalism, in their efforts to secure Mosul from Kemalist control.⁷ Within the Iraqi parliament, Kurdish deputies were carefully selected by British administrators to rubber stamp pro-British measures.⁸ Adopting an uncompromising posture towards Kurdish demands for autonomy thus became a means for the Baghdad elite to demonstrate their nationalist credentials and challenge British influence over Iraqi state affairs. Any Iraqi politician who adopted a stance to the contrary or voiced any hint of sympathy for the Kurds--al-Sa'dun, for instance--could expect fierce opposition from the ex-Sharifians and a short tenure.

Finally, the period of almost uninterrupted military uprisings by Kurdish tribal leaders, often cloaked in the garb of nationalism, exposed the dire weakness of the new state. Remarking on one such revolt in 1930, King Faisal warned:

⁶ See, for example, the debate within the Iraqi parliament on minorities in Mosul in al-Hasani, *Ta'rikh al-Wizarat*, Vol. 3, 122-126. Interestingly, Iraqi fears over the security of Mosul were a significant impetus for its successive union attempts with Syria. This view is contained in the memoirs of Taha al-Hashimi, who served as commander in chief of Iraq's army during the mandate. Taha al-Hashimi, *Mudhakkirat Taha al-Hashimi*, Vol. 2 (Beirut: Dar al-tali'a, 1978), 178, 296.

⁷ 'Abd al-Razzaq al-Hasani, *Ta'rikh al-Iraq al-Siyasi al-Hadith*, 284. See also the memoirs of Iraqi minister of the interior, 'Abd al-'Aziz al-Qassab, *Min Dhikriyati*, 273-4. Foreign missionaries were also accusing of fomenting "sectarianism" in northern Iraq, particularly among the area's Christian minority.

⁸ Lady Gertrude Bell, ed. *Letters of Gertrude Bell* Vol. 2 (London: E. Benn, 1927), 344.

What we suffered at the time of Shaykh Mahmud's rebellion and the obvious numerical inferiority of our military forces at the time, call for an assessment of our strength in putting down an armed rebellion. *All of this compels me to state that the government is far weaker than the people.*⁹ (italics added)

Unable to effectively establish firm control over the mountainous regions of the north, Iraqi army officers were forced to rely upon their British advisors who possessed the one instrument capable of subduing the Kurdish tribes: airpower.¹⁰ The successful suppression of the Kurdish uprisings thus assumed a new urgency for the officer class; it was a means to challenge British dominance in the country and prove the mettle of the indigenous army.

This chapter will therefore analyze the struggle between the Iraqi state and the Kurds in the context of British imperial control from 1919 to 1932. It will focus on the Kurdish issue during the Mosul dispute, the spread of Arabism to Iraqi institutions, and a rising trend of anti-imperialism among the officer corps. Specifically, its goal is to understand how the ideological and political forces emanating from Baghdad, together with British policies in northern Iraq, provoked a series of armed rebellions among the Kurds. Conversely, it will examine how the pressures of this dissent shaped the political evolution of the Iraqi state and its relationship with Britain.

To understand why concessions to the Kurds were viewed in Baghdad as constituting such an existential threat to the state, it is first necessary to consider the role of the Kurds in the struggle for Mosul, focusing specifically on British efforts to mobilize Kurdish identity as a counterweight to Turkish influence in the region.

⁹ Bengio, 144.

¹⁰ For an excellent discussion of the RAF in Iraq, see Omissi, 18-39.

The Kurds and the Struggle for Mosul: 1919-1925

Following Britain's occupation of Mesopotamia in World War I, British administrators in Iraq sought to safeguard the still-fragile borders of the mandate's northern province from Turkish influence and penetration. In the calculations of Britain's strategists, the former Ottoman *vilayet* of Mosul was the prize of the mandate—a territory upon which its future economic and political security hinged. “Dependent as they are upon the wheat of Mosul,” argued one British report to the League of Nations, “the *vilayets* of Baghdad and Basra would be at the mercy of a Turkish army in the Mosul *vilayet*.¹¹ Furthermore, the India Office viewed the revenue from potential oil deposits uncovered by recent exploration surveys in the region as absolutely essential to the infrastructural development of the new Iraqi state.¹² Desperate to safeguard these resources with as little manpower as possible, Britain believed that a frontier line drawn farther south would necessitate a larger garrison of British troops to protect the vulnerable plains from a northern attack.¹³

In short, the occupier of the Mosul province, the British believed, could exert a veritable stranglehold over the agricultural and economic livelihood of Basra and Baghdad. It is important to note that this strategic appraisal of Mosul's importance was later used by the Iraqi monarchy and the ex-Sharifians to buttress their arguments against brokering any concessions to the region's non-Arab inhabitants.¹⁴ As King Faisal would later state in 1924: “I consider it impossible, both strategically and economically, for a

¹¹ League of Nations, *Question of the Frontier Between Turkey and Iraq* (Lausanne, Imprimeries Reunies, 1924), 73.

¹² Sluglett, *Britain in Iraq*, 137.

¹³ Ibid., 73.

¹⁴ Al-Hasani, *Ta’rikh al-Wizarat*, Vol. 3, 126. Also, “The Fountain of Iraq’s Life,” *Al-Iraq*, No. 735, 8 November 1922 in Jarman, ed., *Political Diaries*, Vol. 2, 424.

Government in Baghdad to live if Mosul is detached...Mosul is to Iraq as the head is to the rest of the body.”¹⁵

Aside from these economic and strategic arguments for the survival of Iraq, Mosul served, in essence, as a buffer to protect Britain’s wider regional interests. It was viewed as an impenetrable no-man’s land, a mountainous empty space between Britain’s strategic interests in the Gulf and the threat of encroachment from an increasingly jingoistic Turkey or, even worse, Bolshevik Russia.¹⁶ As Kenneth Williams wrote in 1926, “Mosul represents...an attempt to rehabilitate the system of buffer states between the Mediterranean and India which was before the war an abiding axiom.”¹⁷

While British intelligence assessments of Turkey’s expansionist aims and the extent of its cooperation with Bolshevik Russia may have been exaggerated, the perception of a tangible danger was real.¹⁸ It compelled Britain to develop a unique strategy of indirect rule, whereby a small number of political officers would secure the allegiance of the region’s influential tribal chiefs to act, in effect, as imperial proxies for His Majesty’s government.¹⁹ Such a strategy was rooted firmly in Britain’s India school of colonial rule. In developing Britain’s policy in Mosul, Sir Arnold Wilson and his staff of ex-India officials drew striking parallels between the rugged wilderness and tribal society of the northern province and India’s North West Frontier, where British authority

¹⁵ League of Nations, *Question of the Frontier Between Turkey and Iraq*, 7.

¹⁶ For British perceptions of the Kemalist-Bolshevik threat, see Aaron Klieman, *Foundations of British Policy in the Arab World: The Cairo Conference of 1921* (Baltimore MD: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1970), 78-81, 168-169. Also, Peter J. Beck, “‘A Tedious and Perilous Controversy’: Britain and the Settlement of the Mosul Dispute, 1918-1926,” *Middle Eastern Studies* 17:2 (April 1981), 257-258.

¹⁷ Kenneth Williams, “The Significance of Mosul,” *The Nineteenth Century and After* 99 (1926), 349, cited in Ali, 310.

¹⁸ See A.L. Macfie, “British Intelligence and the Causes of Unrest in Mesopotamia, 1919-1921,” *Middle Eastern Studies* 35:1 (January 1999), 165-177, for a re-evaluation of British intelligence sources in light of the recent opening of Soviet archives for the period.

¹⁹ Wallace Lyon, *Kurds, Arabs, and Britons: The Memoir of Wallace Lyon in Iraq, 1918-1944*, ed. D.K. Fieldhouse (London: I.B. Tauris, 2001), 27-29. Bell, *Review*, 49-59.

had legitimated a highly personalized system of rule based on tribal patronage. Influential Pashtun chiefs were assigned a British advisor, who served as a conduit for British arms, money, and advice. Each chief, in turn, was held accountable for the conduct of the tribesmen under his purview, the raising and maintaining of a militia, and the collection of taxes.²⁰

As early as 1916, British administrators began to apply the Pashtun template in Iraq with the passage of the Tribal Criminal and Civil Disputes Regulations. By legalizing tribal law and funding influential *shaykhs*, these regulations attempted to reorder the political landscape of Iraq to facilitate British control over its countryside with as few British soldiers as possible.²¹ In Iraqi Kurdistan, it was a policy that may have succeeded in creating a buffer against Turkish penetration, but would ultimately present significant obstacles for subsequent Iraqi state-building and centralization efforts.

Co-opting Shaykh Mahmud

Among the local chiefs of Kurdistan, the most powerful in terms of his armed retinue and tribal pedigree was a certain Shaykh Mahmud Barzinji, who commanded significant support in the influential town of Sulaymania.²² Sensing that the locus of political power had shifted from Istanbul to London, Shaykh Mahmud had written to Sir Arnold Wilson following Britain's defeat of the Ottomans expressing his wish to rule in the name of the British crown. After weighing other options for establishing a measure

²⁰This parallel was drawn in Jwaideh, 274-6.

²¹ Provisions of this measure exerted a profound impact on rural society in Iraq and would remain in effect, at least partially, until the 1958 revolution. Sluglett, *Britain in Iraq*, 239-253. Also, Nelida Fuccaro, "Ethnicity, State Formation, and Conscription in Postcolonial Iraq: The Case of the Yazidi Kurds of Jebel Sinjar," *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 29 (1997), 561.

²² His pre-eminent position in Kurdish politics derived from his status as a descendent of Kak Ahmed, a respected *sayyid* of the Qadiri Sufi order. *Review of Civil Administration of Iraq for the Year 1920*, 59-60 in *Iraq Administration Reports*, 1914-1932, Vol. 5 (Oxford: Archive Editions, 1992), 61. Also, C.J. Edmonds, *Kurds, Turks, and Arabs: Politics, Travel and Research in North-eastern Iraq, 1919-1925* (London: Oxford University Press, 1957), 68-75.

of British control over the region, Wilson authorized a British political officer with experience in Persia, Major E.W. Noel, to “appoint Shaykh Mahmud our representative in Sulaymania...and to make other appointments of this nature at (the neighboring towns of) Chemchemal, Halabja, etc.”²³ This move was quickly followed by a invitation by Wilson to the other tribal chiefs in the former Mosul *vilayet*, encouraging them to accept the authority of Shaykh Mahmud, as the Britain’s governor of Sulaymania.²⁴ Each tribal chieftain, under this scheme, would be appointed a British advisor, who would help ensure their loyalty to Shaykh Mahmud.²⁵

The system of tribal control devised by Major E.W. Noel set up areas of jurisdiction in northern Iraq that were completely independent of any central control from Baghdad. Political officers assigned to the sub-provincial districts, or *liwas*, of the former Mosul province had enormous latitude in their dealings with local tribal chiefs and often implemented policies that were explicitly at odds with Britain’s broader mandate of preparing Iraq for eventual independence.²⁶ Furthermore, Britain’s policy of co-opting the tribal chiefs effectively arrested a process of “de-tribalization” in northern Iraq that had begun in the waning years of the Ottoman period.²⁷ As explained by one of its chief critics in Britain’s administration, the political officer, Major E.B. Soane:

²³ Bell, *Review*, 62.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 63.

²⁵ It is important to note that British administrators over-estimated the extent of local support for Shaykh Mahmud. Most importantly, the Turcomen notables of Kirkuk opposed being ruled by a Kurd. Mahmud’s power base was limited to speakers of the south-Kurmanji dialect and supporters of the Qadiri Sufi order in the more urban portions of Iraqi Kurdistan. For more on the tribal, linguistic, and religious divisions within Kurdish society, see, Mehrdad R. Izady, *The Kurds: A Concise Handbook* (London: Taylor and Francis, 1992), 64, 183-196 and Martin Van Bruinessen, *Agha, Shaykh, and State: On the Social and Political Organization of Kurdistan* (Rijswijk: Europrint, 1978).

²⁶ There were four *liwas* in the Mosul *vilayet*: Mosul, Irbil, Sulaymania, and Kirkuk. For descriptions of life as a political officer in Iraqi Kurdistan, Lyon, *Kurds, Arabs, and Britons: The Memoir of Wallace Lyon in Iraq, 1918-1944*, C.J. Edmonds, *Kurds, Turks, and Arabs*, and W.R. Hay, *Two Years in Kurdistan: Experiences of a Political Officer, 1918-1920* (London, Sidgwick and Jackson, 1921).

²⁷ Fuccaro, 561.

Revival of the tribal system was...a retrograde movement. Already South Kurdistan had become largely de-tribalized and a measure of prosperity, in consequence, had been its lot in pre-war times. Now, the political officer Noel, accepting the views of Shaykh Mahmud, devoted his energies to re-tribalizing. Every man who could be labeled a tribesman was placed under a tribal leader...Petty village headman were unearthed and discovered as leaders of long-dead tribes...Law was to be administered by this chief, who must only recognize Shaykh Mahmud as *hukumdar* (governor)...ideal for the clansman but fatal for trade, civilization, and tranquility²⁸

By nurturing the establishment of personal fiefdoms among Kurdish tribal leaders, and doing little to curtail the massive flow of arms into the north, British advisors created strong suspicions in Baghdad among Faysal and the ex-Sharifians about ulterior British motives. If Britain's goal in Iraq was to promote a measure of national cohesion in the country and to assist the central government in establishing control over its territory, why, Iraqi nationalists later demanded in 1930, was its policy in the north sowing the seeds of separatism and political discord? Why was it tinkering with powerful social forces whose ability to wreak havoc on the stability of the new state it did not seem to fully comprehend?²⁹

Britain soon realized that co-opting the Kurdish leaders of the north was a double-edged sword. Recognizing that British support endowed him with an excellent advantage over his tribal enemies, Shaykh Mahmud attempted to expand his control beyond the areas envisioned for him by his British backers. In May 1919, he ceremoniously proclaimed an independent Kurdistan, seized the treasury at Sulaymania, raised his own flag, and imprisoned his British advisors. Viewing the revolt as a dangerous provocation that

²⁸ Quoted in McDowell, 157.

²⁹ Al-Hasani, "Al-Mu'amara 'ala Salamat al-Dawla," *Ta'rikh al-Wizarat*, Vol. 3, 120-123.

could quickly ignite other uprisings throughout Mesopotamia, Wilson ordered its swift repression, followed by the exile of Shaykh Mahmud to Kuwait.³⁰

The first in a series of armed uprisings led by Shaykh Mahmud that would plague the nascent Iraqi government for the next decade, the May 1919 revolt is significant in several respects. First, it demonstrated that uprisings in Iraqi Kurdistan often took on the hue of nationalist agitation, when they were in fact more traditional expressions of tribal resistance to encroachment by the state or even inter-tribal feuds.³¹ Shaykh Mahmud, according to Sir Arnold Wilson, had “strapped like a talisman to his arm” a page from the Qur'an upon which was written in Kurdish the text of Woodrow Wilson's twelfth point calling for the self-determination of the Ottoman Empire's ethnic minorities.³² He created a thin veneer of nationalism through the use of flags, postage stamps, and slogans, yet his ultimate appeal was based upon his lineage as a *sayyid*,³³ his call for *jihad*, and the tribal loyalties of his armed fighters.³⁴

Secondly, the revolt failed to generate significant support among Mahmud's rivals; a failure which made apparent to British political officers the “lack of corporate feeling” among the Kurds. Such factionalism and discord, the British believed, presented a dangerous window of opportunity for Turkish agents to exert unwanted influence in the high-stakes game for Mosul.³⁵

³⁰ A.T. Wilson, *Mesopotamia, 1917-1920: A Clash of Loyalties* (London: Oxford University Press 1930), 139.

³¹ McDowell, 158.

³² Ibid., 137. The political officer, Major Noel, wrote: “The tantalizing version of President Wilson's doctrine that everyone should do as they like as slowly dawned on their horizon, with all its luring possibilities, and the (Kurds) are now convinced that if they shout loud enough President Wilson will hear.” Quoted in Bell, *Review*, 69.

³³ A descendant of the Prophet Muhammad.

³⁴ McDowell, 158.

³⁵ Wilson, 133-134. One of the Iraqi *mutassarifs*, or provincial governors, for Mosul would later organize Kurdish rallies to demonstrate their sympathies for Iraqi, as opposed to Turkish rule, during the

Britain's New Strategy

Following the Shaykh Mahmud revolt, Britain curtailed its policy of tribal sponsorship and attempted instead to foster a sense of unity among the Kurds through the creation of a Kurdish press, the implementation of written Kurdish in schools, and other proto-nationalist reforms. Major Soane, the outspoken critic of the tribal policy, was appointed the governor of Sulaymania in 1920, and within a year had established the first Kurdish newspaper and schools at nearby Halabja and Chemchemal.³⁶ He himself was personally involved in the writing, editing, and printing of *Peshkawtin* (Progress), the first Kurdish journal in Sulaymania which advocated Kurdish national autonomy under British protection.³⁷ Such measures, undertaken largely from his initiative, “helped to secure a degree of local autonomy which was not enjoyed by any other part of the occupied territories (in Iraq).”³⁸ Throughout the region, his fellow British political officers introduced Kurdish as the official written language in place of the Turkish of government and the Persian of correspondence.³⁹

The institutionalization of written Kurdish and the creation of a nationalist press were seen by the British as the only viable counterweights to a steady stream of Kemalist propaganda that threatened to seduce the Kurds into the hands of the Turks.⁴⁰ As evidenced from this sample leaflet in 1921, such propaganda frequently took on a anti-

League of Nations boundary commission, which toured the area prior to the resolution of the Mosul dispute. Al-Qassab, *Min Dhikriyati*, 252.

³⁶ Anon, “Major Soane at Sulaimaniyah,” *Journal of the Royal Central Asian Society* 10 (1923), 147.

³⁷ Ali, 171.

³⁸ Anon, “Major Soane at Sulaimaniyah,” 147.

³⁹ C.J. Edmonds, “A Kurdish Newspaper: *Rozh-i-Kurdistan*,” *Journal of the Royal Central Asian Society* 12 (1925), 84.

⁴⁰ The idea received endorsement from Lord Curzon. Shuckburgh to Foreign Office, No. 55849, 11 September 1922, FO371/7781, cited in Saad Eskander, “Southern Kurdistan under Britain’s Mesopotamian Mandate: From Separation to Incorporation, 1920-1923,” *Middle Eastern Studies* 37:2 (April 2001), 167. Also, H.E. the High Commissioner for Iraq, Intelligence Report, 1 January 1923 in Jarman, ed., *Political Diaries*, Vol. 2, 468.

British, pan-Islamic tenor: “At present, the British are intriguing against the Khalifa and the Ottoman Empire which has protected all the holy places of Islam for the last 600 years.” And more ominously, an alleged quote from Lord Kitchener: “My mind will not be at ease until I remove the remains of Muhammed from his tomb at Medina to the museums of Paris.”⁴¹ Britain’s counterargument to these religious-based provocations was to sponsor the creation of the *National Society of Defense* in Sulaymania, a Kurdish nationalist forum which would later serve as a platform for the Kurdish intelligentsia to launch their demands for autonomy against the Iraqi government. British officials also supported the Kurdish journal *Zhiyanawa*, which published editorials reminding the Kurds of their sufferings under the Turks and the need for friendship with Britain.⁴² In December 1921, British political officers oversaw the formation an elective council in the Sulaymania *liwa*, comprised of Kurdish representatives from the three neighboring *liwas* who coordinated the region’s economic and educational affairs and sought to minimize Turkish influence.⁴³

Given the degree of administrative autonomy developing in Iraqi Kurdistan, it is not surprising that the majority of the region’s inhabitants feared their incorporation into an Arab-dominated state, preferring instead a form of independence under British supervision. The Colonial Office repeatedly assured the Kurds that it had no desire to place them under Arab rule against their will--assurances stemming from Britain’s belief that the population would be driven into the hands of the Kemalists if confronted with

⁴¹ This particular appeal was directed at Indian Muslims in Britain’s army. H.E. the High Commissioner for Mesopotamia, Baghdad, Intelligence Report, 31 January 1921 in Jarman, ed., *Political Diaries*, Vol. 1, 147. In March 1924, the Turkish Grand National Assembly officially abolished the Caliphate. British political officer C.J. Edmonds remarked, “That the Turks should have cut the ground from their own feet this way seemed to good to be true.” C.J. Edmonds, *Kurds, Turks and Arabs*, 383.

⁴² Ali, 325.

⁴³ Secretariat of HE the High Commissioner for Iraq, Baghdad, Intelligence Report, 15 December 1921 in Jarman, ed., *Political Diaries*, Vol. 1, 616.

domination by an Arab government in Baghdad.⁴⁴ These expressions of overt sympathy from Britain, combined with its material support for the institutions of Kurdish national autonomy, fueled subsequent perceptions in Baghdad of a hostile, Kurdish-Anglo axis determined to thwart the territorial consolidation of the new Arab nation.⁴⁵

Faysal and the Constituent Assembly

Such perceptions were given further credence at the Cairo Conference of March 1921 and its important impact on relations between the newly-established monarchy and its northern territory. Convened by the Colonial Office under Winston Churchill, the conference set out the guidelines and future policy for British control in the wake of the 1920 revolt against the India Office's heavy-handed rule. Aside from designating Faysal as Iraq's king and developing the scheme of air control to reduce British expenditures, the conference debated the incorporation of "southern Kurdistan" into Iraq.

Representing the ex-Sharifian, Arab position in Iraq were Sir Percy Cox and the Oriental Secretary Gertrude Bell, who argued that the northern province was an integral part of any future state, both economically and strategically. Cox and Bell believed that, apart from a few Kurdish agitators in Sulaymania, the majority of Mosul's inhabitants wished to join Iraq. Sir Arnold Wilson and the former political officer E.W. Noel argued that such a move would be greeted with widespread Kurdish unrest and would inevitably necessitate the unwanted deployment of more British troops. Churchill, sharing this position, had little faith in an Arab army's capacity to defend the country's northern borders against the Kemalists, and favored the creation of an administratively

⁴⁴ The Grand National Assembly of the Kemalists, in their bid to win Mosul, undertook to establish an autonomous administration for "dignitaries of the Kurdish nation" in harmony with their national custom. The Kurds would choose their local representatives. Eskander, 165.

⁴⁵ Al-Hasani, *Ta'rikh al-Wizarat*, Vol. 3, 122.

autonomous “buffer state” populated by pro-British Kurds. The conference ultimately decided against the attachment of the region to Faysal’s new kingdom.⁴⁶

In October 1921, Colonial Secretary Hubert Young arrived in Baghdad to tell the newly-installed King Faysal of the conference’s decision to support the administrative autonomy of “Southern Kurdistan” from any future Iraqi state. Young emphasized to the king that a friendly, yet independent Kurdistan on Iraq’s northern border would protect Mesopotamia’s northern frontier, while sharing in Iraq’s markets and access to the sea. Establishment of more direct rule over the north, what Young termed “Arab imperialism,” would undoubtedly drive the Kurds into the hands of the Kemalists.⁴⁷

Nevertheless, Faysal explicitly stated his demand that the northern province was an integral part of his kingdom, whose detachment would not be tolerated. Beyond the territorial security afforded by the inclusion of Mosul or its potential oil revenues, there were important political dimensions to Faysal’s insistence. The Kurds were to play an important part in helping the new monarch consolidate his rule.⁴⁸ Faced with the threat of political mobilization among the Shi‘i *mujtahids* against his throne, Faysal had no wish to see his Sunni-based coterie marginalized in a Shi‘i-dominated state.⁴⁹ The Sunni Kurds were thus viewed as a sort of sectarian counterweight that could help him check and manage the power of the *mujtahids*—a strategy later endorsed by the British

⁴⁶ Klieman, 110, 167-168

⁴⁷ Ibid., 168.

⁴⁸ Although the Kurdish notables of the Mosul *liwa* voted for Faysal as Iraq’s monarch, their acceptance of his throne was contingent upon 1) the continuation of the British mandate 2) recognition of Kurdish as the official language of education, justice, and administration 3) provision of legal guarantees for Kurdish rights 4) the right to join a future “northern Kurdistan” as provided for by the Treaty of Sevres. Sulaymania did not take part in the referendum. Ali, 233.

⁴⁹ Having received their education in either southern Iraq or Persia, the *mujtahids* were an important class of religious scholars who enjoyed considerable political influence among both the urban and tribal segments of Shi‘i society until roughly 1936. Nakash, 75-88.

authorities in Baghdad who, after the 1920 revolt, feared the implications of Shi‘i ascendancy in Iraq.⁵⁰

In particular, the Hashemite king found a supportive ally in the High Commissioner for Iraq, Sir Percy Cox. In direct opposition to the recommendations of the Cairo Conference, Cox actively sought to incorporate the Kurds of the north into the new Iraqi kingdom. Fearing that widespread opposition to the non-inclusion of Mosul could spark another nationalist uprising among the ex-Sharifians--along the lines of the 1920 revolt--he purged from his administration those British personnel who supported an independent Kurdistan. He challenged Churchill’s notion of a quasi-independent “buffer state” in the north, and instead presented a scheme for the political integration of the Kurds with certain administrative guarantees--such as a degree of British supervision--to ostensibly prevent their oppression at the hands of an Arab government in Baghdad. It was a remarkable example of how “the man on the spot” implemented colonial policies completely at odds with the intentions of his superiors in London.⁵¹

In October 1922, Faysal issued a decree to convene elections for a Constituent Assembly in Baghdad, a representative body that would include delegates from every province in the new kingdom. Despite expressing their vocal opposition to his rule in the 1921 referendum, the Kurdish districts of Mosul--with the exception of Sulaymania--were included in his call for elections.⁵² The objective of this move, tacitly endorsed by Cox, was to cultivate a cadre of Kurdish deputies in Baghdad, whose loyalty to the Hashimite throne could be bought with the fruits of office, and whose predictable

⁵⁰ Ibid., 72.

⁵¹ Churchill eventually moderated his opposition to Cox’s incorporation scheme. Eskander, 163.

⁵² H.E. the High Commissioner for Iraq, Baghdad, Intelligence Report (Secret), 1 November 1922 in Jarman, ed., *Political Diaries*, Vol. 2, 386.

endorsement of pro-British, anti-Shi‘i measures in the Assembly would help stabilize the new regime.

In order to entice the Kurdish deputies to Baghdad, the Iraqi Council of Ministers had passed several resolutions guaranteeing a measure of cultural autonomy for the Kurds. The government promised it would not appoint Arab officials in the Kurdish districts of Mosul and that it would not force the Kurds to use Arabic in official correspondence. In the vaguest of terms, it guaranteed that the rights of the religious and ethnic communities of Mosul would be safeguarded. Encouraged by these gestures of good faith, five Kurdish deputies joined the Constituent Assembly in 1923.⁵³

For Sir Percy Cox, the participation of these pro-British deputies played a critical role in preserving Britain’s influence in Iraq. It helped to ratify the Anglo-Iraq Treaty of 1922 in the face of concerted opposition from both an anti-British, nationalists bloc--led by the prominent ex-Sharifian Yasin al-Hashimi--and the Shi‘i *mujtahids*. In the words of Cox:

The inclusion of Kurdistan had a further aspect for him (Faysal), which we probably had not fully considered. It is the question of the preponderance of Sunnis or Shi‘is in the Constituent Assembly, which was going to be an important policy-making body in Iraq. If the Kurdish representatives, who were for the most part Sunnis, were left out, a strong Shi‘i majority would make Faysal’s task of governing Iraq difficult. Since the Shi‘is at the time were under the influence of their anti-British religious leadership, the Constituent Assembly would have refused to ratify the Anglo-Iraq Treaty of 1922.⁵⁴

It was a viewed shared by Cox’s successor, Sir Henry Dobbs, who wrote in 1924 that the Kurds had proven themselves to be:

the sheet anchor of British influence in Iraq...it was only through the pro-British, “Kurdish bloc” in the Constituent Assembly that the 1922 Anglo-Iraqi Treaty was

⁵³ Lyon, 39.

⁵⁴ Cox to Churchill, Baghdad High Commission File, 13/14, *Events in Kurdistan*, Vol. 3, Telegram No. 11/12 503, 22 September 1922 cited in Ali, 256.

finally accepted in June 1924. And since then, they have consistently supported British policy by their votes and their influence.⁵⁵

There were other important reasons for the inclusion of the Kurds into the Assembly. The non-participation of the Kurds of northern Iraq in any representative Iraqi elections would greatly enhance the Turkish claim to the Mosul Province at the on-going Lausanne Peace conference. It would undercut Britain's argument that the three provinces of Basra, Baghdad, and Mosul were politically inter-dependent. Finally, and most importantly, Faysal expected that the incorporation of loyal Kurdish deputies into the Iraqi parliament would help marginalize and dampen the nationalist clamor emanating from Sulaymania, particularly after the return of Shaykh Mahmud.

The Recurring Specter of Shaykh Mahmud

In September 1922, a major Turkish force, aided by Kurdish irregulars, attacked the strategic town of Rowanduz in the Mosul province. Unable to confront this provocation with British troops alone, British political officers attempted, without success, to find a suitable Kurdish leader who could rally pro-British Kurds. In a frantic, last ditch-effort, the British brought back Shaykh Mahmud from his exile in Kuwait.⁵⁶ As summed up by political officer C.J. Edmonds, "We had despaired of keeping out the Turks with our own resources, and had brought back Mahmud to consolidate Kurdish national feeling to do so."⁵⁷

The move was opposed in Baghdad by Faysal and the ex-Sharifians, who offered to send the Iraqi army to defend the northern province against the Kemalists.⁵⁸ Rebuffed

⁵⁵ Dobbs to Shuckburgh, Lismore, Ireland, 16 March 1926, FO 371/15311 cited in McDowell, 170.

⁵⁶ Edmonds, *A Kurdish Newspaper*, 84.

⁵⁷ Edmonds, *Kurds, Turks, and Arabs*, 303-304.

⁵⁸ Bell, *Letters*, Vol. 2, 295

by their British advisors, the Baghdad elite viewed the return of Shaykh Mahmud as a cynical British ploy--proof that despite its token assurances of support for the consolidation of the new kingdom, Britain was using Kurdish agitation in the north as a useful lever against the monarchy.⁵⁹ It was a suspicion not without basis.

Not long after his return to northern Iraq, Shaykh Mahmud once again declared himself the king of an independent Kurdistan and secured a strong following from the burgeoning Kurdish nationalist movement in Sulaymania. The Kurdish urban intelligentsia, emboldened by the military power wielded by Shaykh Mahmud, petitioned Baghdad for administrative separation from the Iraqi state.⁶⁰ Even more ominously, Mahmud entered into contact with Kemalist forces, attempting to play off his local patrons against one another in order to enlarge his own stature and power base.⁶¹ Although his revolt met with fierce bombardment by the RAF, it had served a useful purpose for British administrators in their efforts to force the passage of the Anglo-Iraq Treaty by an increasingly reluctant Faysal. Shaykh Mahmud's uprising and the threat of Kurdish secession from the kingdom were a reminder to Faysal that, should the Anglo-Iraq Treaty have failed to be ratified, Britain could consent to Kurdish demands for autonomy or, at the very least, leave the Iraqi army to face the Kurds alone and without the critical support of the RAF.⁶² The specter of Shaykh Mahmud was therefore a powerful inducement for Faysal to resist the pressures of the anti-British, ex-Sharifian bloc, led by Yasin al-Hashimi.

⁵⁹ Al-Hasani, "Al-Mu'amara 'ala Salamat al-Dawla," *Ta'rikh al-Wizarat*, Vol. 3, 122-128.

⁶⁰ Secretariat of H.E. The High Commissioner for Iraq, Baghdad, Intelligence Report, (Secret) 1 November 1922 in Jarman, ed., *Political Diaries*, Vol. 2, 286.

⁶¹ Great Britain, Colonial Office, *Report on Iraq Administration, April 1922 – March 1923* (London: HMSO, 1924), 36.

⁶² Bell, *Letters*, Vol. 2, 549.

High Commissioner Dobbs went a step further, threatening Faysal with the complete loss of the Mosul province from the kingdom if the Anglo-Iraq treaty failed to be ratified by 10 June.⁶³ While such posturing by Dobbs was undoubtedly perceived as a bluff, it was important in creating the recurring perception in Baghdad that Britain could use the possibility of Kurdish secession in the north as a convenient tool to strengthen its hold over the monarchy. The Treaty was ultimately ratified on 10 June, largely through the votes of the Kurdish deputies and a last-minute deal by the British that brought Yasin al-Hashimi, into the Iraqi government as prime minister, in exchange for his endorsement of the Treaty.⁶⁴ With the Lausanne negotiations winding up, and the issue of Mosul shelved for subsequent arbitration by the League of Nations, the specter of Shaykh Mahmud's revolt had outlived its usefulness—at least temporarily.⁶⁵

The British High Commissioner supported Yasin al-Hashimi's request to occupy Sulaymania with the Iraqi army and crush the revolt. Despite the support of the RAF, the young Iraqi army found itself outgunned by Shaykh Mahmud's mobile irregulars, who used every inch of the mountainous terrain to their advantage and enjoyed significant material support from the local population. An alarming number of local Kurds recruited into the Iraqi Army defected to Shaykh Mahmud's forces, taking with them weapons and, even worse, intelligence on the army's strength and location.⁶⁶ At times, it was only the

⁶³ *Baghdad Times*, 2 June 1924.

⁶⁴ Ali, 306.

⁶⁵ For an in-depth analysis of the Mosul dispute, see V.F. Minorsky, "The Mosul Question," *Bulletin of the Reference Service on International Affairs of the American Library in Paris*, (April 15, 1926), 8-45, reprinted in *International Journal of Kurdish Studies* 7:1-2 (1994), 22-70.

⁶⁶ High Commissioner's Counsellor, Baghdad, to Air Headquarters and to the Ministries of Defence and Interior, Baghdad, enclosing a report on Composition of the Iraq Army, 8 June 1925, AIR 23/120 in Alan de L. Rush, ed., *Records of Iraq, 1914-1966* (UK: Archive Editions, 2001), Vol. 4, 140.

swift intervention of the RAF which saved Iraqi troops from complete disaster at the hands of Shaykh Mahmud's forces.⁶⁷

The campaign dragged on from July to December, with the Iraqi army suffering sizeable casualties. In December, Yasin al-Hashimi was forced to resign from his post as prime minister, partly in the face of intense parliamentary criticism over the Iraqi army's failure to crush the revolt.⁶⁸ For the ex-Ottoman army officer and anti-British nationalist, whose Cabinet had come to power with a mandate to expand the Iraqi army and "strengthen national sentiment," the Shaykh Mahmud revolt served as a humiliating lesson in the Iraqi state's truncated sovereignty.⁶⁹ It was perhaps an even stronger indictment of Britain's intention to keep Iraq weak, since Britain had deliberately brought back Mahmud from his exile.

The Shaykh Mahmud revolt, and the Iraqi army's inept response, exposed what historian Peter Sluglett has termed the "vicious cycle" of dependence during the mandate period, where successive Iraqi governments, despite their pretenses of "nationalism" and "independence," were continually forced into a position of subservience to the British.⁷⁰ Ultimately, the Kurdish uprisings in the north laid bare the hollow claims of the Iraqi Arabists and the Ottoman-trained nation-builders. If, as Anthony Giddens and others have argued, the monopolization of violence by government is one of the key tasks of state-building, then the armed insurgency of the Kurds presented the most daunting

⁶⁷ Great Britain, Colonial Office, *Special Report by His Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the Council of the League of Nations on the Progress of Iraq during the Period 1920-1931* (London: HMSO, 1930), 258.

⁶⁸ Ali, 308.

⁶⁹ H.E. the High Commissioner for Iraq, Baghdad, Intelligence Report (Secret), 21 August 1924 in Jarman, ed., *Political Diaries*, Vol. 3, 542.

⁷⁰ Hemphill, 89.

obstacle to the consolidation of central authority in Iraq during the pre-revolutionary period.⁷¹

As Britain dangled the prize of complete independence in front of the monarchy during the latter half of the 1920s, the Kurdish uprisings acquired an even more ominous character. If the Iraqi army failed to establish full control over its territory and was continually dependent upon British assistance from the RAF, the nationalists wondered, what prevented Britain from delaying Iraq's independence or, even worse, forcing the government into more treaties that abrogated its sovereignty? The comments of High Commissioner Dobbs in 1927 provide a revealing glimpse into the utility of internal dissent for British policymakers, who wielded the RAF as a convenient lever against the monarchy:

My object...is to induce the Iraq government to admit the truth that Iraq cannot maintain herself for some years without a British Air Force and to accept gratefully and without conditions the offer of His Britannic Majesty Government to retain the Air Force in Iraq, so that she may, without delay, settle her military policy on that basis. If the Iraq Government would admit this position, it would be possible to discuss the entry of Iraq into the League and the revision of the Treaty.⁷²

The ex-Sharifians' fears that Kurdish dissent would provide Britain a pretext for delaying independence were compounded by the League of Nation's insistence that the Iraqi government make certain cultural concessions to the Kurds following the Mosul award.

The Kurds and Iraq's Struggle for Independence, 1926-1932

Resolution of the Mosul dispute and the impending termination of the mandate created a new political context for the struggle between the Iraqi state and the Kurds.

⁷¹ For Giddens, the success of the nation-state is closely tied to "the progress of internal pacification." Giddens, *The Nation-State and Violence*, 120.

⁷² Dispatch from Sir Henry Dobbs, Baghdad, to Colonial Secretary, London, 31 March 1927, FO 371/12259 in de L. Rush, ed., *Records of Iraq*, Vol. 4, 412.

Following the award of Mosul to Iraq by the League of Nations on December 16, 1925, Britain abandoned its strategy of cultivating Kurdish autonomy and nationalism as a buffer against Turkish penetration, and instead supported the administrative and political integration of Mosul's inhabitants into the Iraqi kingdom.⁷³ Tribal chiefs who were previously subsidized by the British found themselves confronted with the centralization efforts of the Arab government in Baghdad, which threatened to erode their power through taxation, conscription, and land registration. The urban Kurdish intelligentsia, whose nationalist journals, Kurdish-language schools, and local councils had been previously sanctioned, if not created, by British political officers, were faced with the imposition of an Arabic-based, nationalist ideology emanating from the ex-Sharifians in Baghdad.

Nevertheless, the League's decision to award Mosul to Iraq had been accompanied by several articles that guaranteed a measure of Kurdish linguistic, cultural, and judicial autonomy in northern Iraq. The League made Iraq's eventual admission contingent upon its fulfillment of these articles and called for a new Anglo-Iraq treaty to oversee their implementation.⁷⁴ On 13 January 1926 Iraq and Britain signed a new treaty that extended Britain's influence in the country for the next 25 years. Not surprisingly, the event was greeted with fierce rioting in Baghdad amidst the widespread

⁷³ Such a move was motivated at least in part by Britain's desire to assuage Turkey's fear over the development of Kurdish nationalism in northern Iraq. Britain needed to assure Persia and Turkey that the Kurds in Iraq would receive only limited cultural rights and that both Iraq and Britain were committed to placing the Kurdish districts under firm control in Baghdad. See Lord Amery's remarks in "The Iraq Treaty Debate," *The Economist* 20 February 1926.

⁷⁴ Council of the League of Nations, *Question of the Frontier between Turkey and Iraq*, 88-89.

perception that Britain was using the issue of Kurdish cultural autonomy as a pretext to stay in Iraq.⁷⁵

The Struggle for the Classroom

Among the League's guarantees for Kurdish autonomy to be overseen by the British mandatory authorities, the most threatening from the Arab nationalist point of view were those pertaining to the implementation of written Kurdish in schools and the appointment of Kurdish officials in local government. These measures, while seemingly innocuous compared to previous Kurdish demands for outright secession, were considered so dangerous precisely because they struck at the core of the nationalist vision articulated by Sati' al-Husri.

From 1921 until his resignation in 1936, al-Husri exerted an enormous influence over the direction of Iraqi state-building as Director General of Education. A committed Arab nationalist from Syria and a gifted Ottoman pedagogue, al-Husri's program for Iraq revolved around the transmission of Arab nationalism and patriotism through a standardized, compulsory secondary school education and universal conscription. Accordingly, "the school was to be not only a place for study, but the theater of a new life, the mechanism for social change, by which (he) meant the indoctrination in an Arab nationalist culture."⁷⁶ Such an agenda for an identity-forging education policy rooted in the tenets of Arabism directly contravened the assurances of local autonomy given by the Iraqi government to the Kurds at the time of the Mosul award. Indeed, al-Husri's entire

⁷⁵ H.E. the High Commissioner for Iraq, Baghdad, Intelligence Report (Secret), 21 January 1926 in Jarman, ed., *Political Diaries*, Vol. 4, 209.

⁷⁶ Reeva Simon's otherwise fine monograph on Arabism in Iraq focuses on the reaction of the Shi'i and Jewish population of Iraq to Husri's ideology, but fails to address its clash with the forces of Kurdish nationalism. Simon, "The Imposition of Nationalism on a Non-Nation State," 94. William Cleveland examines the intellectual influences of Husri's ideology, but not its reception by the Iraqi population. William Cleveland, *The Making of an Arab Nationalist: Ottomanism and Arabism in the Life and Thought of Sati' al-Husri* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971).

concept of the nation regarded expressions of Kurdish and non-Arab identity as perfidious factionalism, or what he termed *shu‘ubiyya*.⁷⁷ The critical comments of the Baghdad law professor Mahmud ‘Azmi, a contemporary of Husri’s, shed a revealing light on this ideology:

We mean by ‘Husrism’ (*al-husriyya*) the feeling that to labor for the sake of Arabism requires the adoption of an inimical stance towards non-Arab elements, whether these elements are found within the Arab environment or outside it. This ‘Husrism’ which we have seen in Iraq weakens the Iraqi entity itself, since it looks upon the Kurds with some hatred, and does not desire closer relations with the Iranians or other Muslims who neighbor the (Iraqi) territories...⁷⁸

Most of al-Husri’s tenure, therefore, was spent dodging and evading numerous League-sponsored commissions that insisted on Baghdad’s implementation of a Kurdish-based curriculum in the northern Iraq. His most frequent excuse for failing to implement the required education reforms in the north was the paucity of Kurdish textbooks, teachers, and the variety of Kurdish dialects.⁷⁹ In February 1926, for instance, British authorities recommended the establishment of a Kurdish translation bureau in Baghdad to produce Kurdish school textbooks and to translate all laws and regulations into Kurdish. Britain’s education advisor to the Iraqi Ministry, Lionel Smith, later quipped, “It is true that there is no standardized Kurdish. We must standardize it.”⁸⁰ Iraq’s minister of the interior, ‘Abd al-‘Aziz al-Qassab, argued that such measures were opposed even by Kurdish parents, and recommended the use of Arabic textbooks, so that “wherever the

⁷⁷ *Shu‘ubiyya*’s powerful meaning has roots in a literary movement during the Abbasid caliphate that aimed to elevate the cultural achievements of the non-Arab Muslims, while denigrating the Arab tradition. See Jawad, “The Triumph of Arabism: The Shu‘ubiyyah Controversy and the National Identity of Modern Iraq,” 53-87 and Kanan Makiya, *Republic of Fear: The Politics of Modern Iraq* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 154, 216.

⁷⁸ Mahmud ‘Azmi, “Jabha min Shu‘ub al-‘Arabiyya,” *al-Hilal*, November 1938. Quoted in Elie Kedourie, “The Kingdom of Iraq: A Retrospect,” 274.

⁷⁹ For Husri’s argument, see “Qadiyat al-Kutub al-Kurdiyya” in Sati‘ al-Husri, *Mudhakkirati fi al-Iraq*, Vol. 1 (Beirut: Dar al-Tali‘ah, 1966-1968), 457-474.

⁸⁰ Quoted in Sluglett, *Britain in Iraq*, 184.

pupils do not understand the Arabic, the teacher should explain and translate them in the Kurdish tongue.”⁸¹ The widespread exasperation of British officials at such opposition is perhaps best expressed by C.J. Edmonds: “Nobody denies that the practical solution of the Kurdish problem bristles with difficulties, but all efforts are concentrated on not overcoming them.”⁸²

Throughout the latter half of the 1920s, British advisors called for two secondary boarding schools in Kurdish areas, where the primary language of instruction would be Kurdish, but where Arabic would also be taught to prepare students for university studies at an Arab institution. The Kurds themselves demanded the creation of a separate education district, comprised of the northern cities of Kirkuk, Sulaymania, and Irbil, to be administered by a Kurdish official.⁸³ For al-Husri, such a concession to the forces of particularism in a fragmented society had dangerous implications and threatened to erode the control of the center over the periphery:

For naturally...the overwhelming majority of the pupils in the teachers' school in Mosul would be the sons of Christians and in Hilla the sons of Ja'farites (Shi'is). And this would lead to a strengthening of sectarianism among the teachers. Better that the teachers college (in Baghdad) collect students from all parts of the country and from different sects...in order that they will develop together with a spirit of patriotism...above considerations of sect.⁸⁴

Responses to Kurdish Agitation

Such fears of ethnic fragmentation were compounded by the realization that the grumblings of dissent from the Kurds to the League could jeopardize the kingdom's independence. Following Britain's announcement in September 1929 that it would

⁸¹ Dobbs to Cornwallis, DO SO 1372 of 25 June 1936, cited in Sluglett, *Britain in Iraq*, 184.

⁸² Ibid., 186.

⁸³ Great Britain, Colonial Office, *Report by His Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and North Ireland to the Council of the League of Nations on the Administration of Iraq for the Year 1930* (London: HMSO, 1930), 24-25.

⁸⁴ Quoted in Marr, “Development,” 93.

support Iraq's entry into the League in 1932, the Kurdish notables and nationalists of Sulaymania launched a string of petitions to Geneva, protesting Baghdad's failure to implement the guarantees of the Mosul award and arguing that, under the stipulations of the 1922 Anglo-Iraq Treaty, they had been promised formal British protection for another 25 years.⁸⁵ Officially sanctioned by the League, these petitions were a conduit for the Kurds and other non-Arab minorities in northern Iraq to circumvent Baghdad and voice their grievances directly to Geneva. The League, in turn, would relay its concerns to the British mandatory authorities who would then pressure the monarchy to implement the articles of cultural autonomy specified in the Mosul award.

Baghdad saw the entire petition mechanism and its use by the Kurds as an intrusive threat to Iraqi sovereignty in the northern province at a time when the ruling elite had not altogether abandoned its suspicions of Turkish designs there.⁸⁶ Furthermore, the petitions seemed to provide Britain with an excuse for continued influence in Iraq, under the pretext that the Iraqi government needed closer supervision in its treatment of minorities. Or, even worse, Britain could declare Iraq's government unfit for League admission, as hinted in this warning:

Arab nationalists will need to bear in mind that the end in view (independence) will be more speedily and more surely attained if the national aspirations of their Kurdish fellow subjects are treated with as much consideration as the similar sentiments which they themselves cherish.⁸⁷

Ultimately, however, such warnings failed to exert any influence on the direction of Iraqi state-building and the government's relationship with the Kurds. The ex-

⁸⁵ Great Britain, Colonial Office, *Report For the Year 1930*, 25-26.

⁸⁶ This view is evident in Khaldun S. Husry's discussion of the Assyrian massacre of 1933 (to be discussed in Chapter 2). Husry, 161-176/344-360.

⁸⁷ Great Britain, Colonial Office, *Report by his Britannic Majesty's Government on the Administration of Iraq for the Period April, 1923 – December, 1924* (London: HMSO, 1924), 19.

Sharifian nationalists called London's bluff. They recognized Britain's eagerness to absolve itself of its mandatory responsibilities in Iraq by demonstrating the good behavior of the Iraqi government to Geneva, while at the same time maintaining its influence through treaty. Ironically, then, the monarchy found a willing conspirator in the British authorities who emphasized in their yearly reports to Geneva Iraq's solid progress in fulfilling its obligations to the Kurds.⁸⁸ According to British reports to the League, Kurdish petitions were solely the product of a few agitators and enjoyed limited sympathy. Shaykh Mahmud and his followers were thus described as a "small band of outlaws," whose capacity to cause trouble had been seriously curtailed.⁸⁹

Privately, though, in their conversations with the monarchy and key Iraqi ministers, the British warned that Kurdish discontent was widespread and growing, and urged the implementation of linguistic and educational reforms as a means to undercut the growing power of the more militant, separatist current in Kurdish politics, led by Shaykh Mahmud.⁹⁰ The Iraqi position was to downplay the threat of Kurdish mobilization and emphasize that any such agitation was the result of British favoritism, as well as the encouragement of English and American missionaries in the area.⁹¹ As the termination of the mandate approached, the government realized it could successfully evade real concessions to the Kurds by making promises on paper and procrastinating on their implementation until independence in 1932. At most, it would suffer a mild rebuke

⁸⁸ Sluglett, *Britain in Iraq*, 194.

⁸⁹ "With the sole exception of Shaykh Mahmud and his band of outlaws, the Kurds of Iraq tend more and more to play their natural part in the national life of the country...In respecting Kurdish susceptibilities, the Iraq Government has...set an example among Near Eastern countries." Great Britain, Colonial Office, *Report by His Britannic Majesty's Government to the Council of the League of Nations on the Administration of Iraq for the Year 1925* (London: HMSO, 1925), 22-23.

⁹⁰ Ministry of the Interior, Baghdad, Cornwallis to al-Midfa'i (Very Secret) No. SI/509, 19 August 1930, in Jarman, ed., *Political Diaries*, Vol. 5, 241.

⁹¹ Foreign missionaries were an even greater irritation to the government concerning the Assyrian Christian community. Al- Hasani, "Isyan Shaykh Mahmud," *Ta'rikh al-Wizarat*, Vol. 6, 29.

from the League. In the meantime, the appropriate response to Kurdish dissent was a military one.

The Military Dimension

As Paul Rich has convincingly argued in his study of internal insurgencies, a new state that chooses to deal with internal dissent through solely military means takes a specific political trajectory. The institution charged with the suppression of the insurgency, the army, develops its own vested interests; military officers accrue political power, prestige, and financial support for the successful prosecution of the counter-insurgency campaign. Gradually, the military option overshadows all other avenues for addressing the root causes of the insurgency. Political or economic solutions such as land reform, infrastructural development, or local autonomy, are increasingly viewed as untenable by an officer class that holds sway over the civilian organs of political power and whose ascendancy depends, to a large extent, upon meeting internal dissent through force.⁹²

This model can certainly help us explain the evolution of the Iraqi state and its relationship to the Kurdish revolts during the late 20s and early 30s. These uprisings--provoked, if not sustained, by Iraq's unwillingness to fulfill the pledges it had made to the League--were an important justification for the military's consolidation of power. It was a process that began in the late 1920s, led to a series of coups in the 1930s, and culminated, ultimately, in the 1958 revolution. As will be discussed in following chapters, the politicians and military officers that took power during 1930s were drawn

⁹² "The waging of a counter-insurgency campaign," he notes, "can rearrange the balance of power within the state, by helping the coercive institutions take priority over the civil institutions of the state." Paul B. Rich, "Introduction: The Counter-Insurgent State," in Paul B. Rich and Richard Stubbs, eds., *The Counter-Insurgent State: Guerrilla Warfare and State-Building in the Twentieth Century* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997), 10.

from the ex-Sharifian bloc and were all firm advocates of the military suppression of Kurdish dissent in the late 1920s. Among these personalities, the two Iraqi ministers of the interior most responsible for Iraq's Kurdish policy during the critical period of 1927 to 1930, Jamil al-Midfa'i and 'Abd al-'Aziz al-Qassab, were also political allies of Yasin al-Hashimi. Al-Hashimi, it will be remembered, was one of the chief advocates for the expansion of an indigenous Iraqi army and the quashing of Kurdish dissent through military force alone.⁹³ More significantly, he spearheaded an effort by the anti-British ex-Sharifians to push forward a conscription bill through the Iraqi parliament.

Beyond its importance as one of Sati' al-Husri's vehicles for the transmission of Arabism and national cohesion, conscription was a means to challenge Britain's military preponderance in the country. It was also a way to undercut the armed power of the tribes, facilitate the government's monopolization of violence, and therefore reduce the specter of communal mobilization among the Kurds and the Shi'is.⁹⁴ Faysal also viewed the expansion of the Iraqi army as a way to provide employment for, and thus placate, the hundreds of ex-Sharifian, Ottoman-trained officers who expressed dissatisfaction with their lot in Iraq and had earlier threatened to defect to the Kemalists.⁹⁵

Predictably, pro-British Kurdish deputies opposed the conscription bill in parliament and were largely responsible for its defeat on numerous occasions.⁹⁶ Aside from their traditional antipathy to any form of state centralization, Kurdish opposition to conscription dovetailed nicely with Britain's policy of blocking the expansion of an

⁹³ His brother, Taha al-Hashimi was commander in chief of the Iraqi army.

⁹⁴ In 1933, the Iraqi army possessed 15,000 firearms, whereas the number of rifles in private hands was estimated to be 100,000. Batatu, 26.

⁹⁵ Office of the High Commissioner for Mesopotamia, Baghdad, Intelligence Report (Secret), 15 April 1921 in Jarman, ed., *Political Diaries*, Vol. 1, 271.

⁹⁶ Tarbush, 90.

indigenous Iraqi army. Compulsory military service, the British argued, would provoke widespread uprisings throughout Iraq from recalcitrant tribal leaders. Such an unstable situation would necessitate an even larger British military commitment to control the countryside.⁹⁷

In response to British opposition, the ex-Sharifian nationalists tended to downplay the tribal roots of popular antipathy towards conscription, attributing it instead to the widespread belief that the Iraqi army would become a tool in the hands of the Britain. Such a force, they argued, would be used expressly for preserving British imperial interests abroad—not unlike the Indian army. Accordingly, the ex-Sharifians believed that if the populace perceived that the Iraqi army would be employed solely to defend Iraqi sovereignty and security, conscription would enjoy universal support.⁹⁸

To push forward conscription, al-Hashimi and the ex-Sharifians needed to demonstrate the Iraqi army's ability to effectively maintain internal security while at the same time challenging Britain's control over state affairs.⁹⁹ The Kurdish uprisings became, therefore, a sort of proving ground upon which the new Iraqi army would justify its expansion and ultimately extricate itself from British tutelage. This nationalist and anti-imperialist imperative became all the more pressing after the negotiation of the Anglo-Iraq Treaty of 1930 and its stipulations for the continued presence of British air bases in Iraq.

The 1930 Treaty

In March 1930, the eminent ex-Sharifian and former Chief of Staff, Nuri-al Sa‘id came to power as prime minister and formed a cabinet comprised of Ja‘far al-‘Askari as

⁹⁷ Hemphill, 96.

⁹⁸ Al-Khattab, 106-107.

⁹⁹ Al-Hasani, “Siyasat Ida‘af al-Jaysh,” *Ta’rikh al-Wizarat*, Vol. 6, 169-171.

defense minister and Jamil al-Midfa‘i as minister of interior. With a mandate from Faysal and the British High Commissioner to push forward the signing of a new Anglo-Iraq treaty in the Iraqi parliament, Nuri’s Cabinet was under tremendous political pressure from a concerted opposition bloc, spearheaded by Yasin al-Hashimi.¹⁰⁰ Attempting to topple Nuri’s Cabinet, al-Hashimi’s nationalist press had circulated rumors that the prime minister was supporting Britain’s machinations to separate Mosul from Iraq and govern it in a manner similar to the Sudan.¹⁰¹

Despite these opposition efforts, the Treaty was ultimately ratified in July 1930, though not without significant debate over its concessions to the British in Iraq. The pro-British Kurdish deputies in parliament had predictably supplied the overwhelming majority of the votes needed to ratify the Treaty, yet Kurdish nationalists in the towns of Barzan and Sulaymania were outraged that the new Treaty made no reference whatsoever to any guarantees for Kurdish rights or local autonomy.¹⁰² The Treaty, they argued, was a complete breach of the government’s previous assurances to the Kurds under the League of Nation’s Mosul award. Such omissions, however, were most likely the only way Nuri could deflect the fierce parliamentary criticism against the Treaty’s other, more substantial concessions to the British.¹⁰³

He was ultimately aided, ironically, in his efforts to pass the treaty by the massive dissent from the Kurdish nationalists, which had the effect of solidifying the ranks of the

¹⁰⁰ See the press extracts contained in the telegram from Sloan to Secretary of State, “The Anglo-Iraq Treaty, its reception by the Iraqi public, etc” 12 August 1930, US State Department Records on Iraq, Internal Affairs, Series 890G.00/130.

¹⁰¹ From a letter to Nuri al-Sa‘id from Yasin al-Hashimi, Ja‘far Abu al-Timman, and Naji al-Suwaydi in al-Hasani, *Ta’rikh al-Wizarat*, Vol. 3, 79.

¹⁰² Kurdish deputies provided 17 of the 37 votes that approved the Anglo-Iraq Treaty. Quoted in Derk Kinnane, *The Kurds and Kurdistan* (London: Oxford University Press, 1964), 39.

¹⁰³ Al-Hasani, “Al-Qadiyya al-Kurdiyya wa al-Mu‘ahada 1930,” *Ta’rikh al-‘Iraq al-Siyasi al-Hadith*, 291.

Arab parliamentarians. No Iraqi politician who opposed the treaty wanted to be seen as falling into the same camp as Barzan and Sulaymania. Furthermore, the majority of the parliament grudgingly acknowledged that some form of treaty with Britain, however threatening to Iraqi sovereignty, was a prerequisite for its admission to the League in 1932.

Nevertheless, the Treaty was widely condemned in subsequent months for its provisions that enabled the British to maintain two air bases in the country, at Habbaniya and Shu'aiba. For Iraqi politicians across the political spectrum, from nearly every sectarian and ethnic group, the air bases were the penultimate symbols of the humiliating relationship the country was condemned to endure, even after its "independence."¹⁰⁴ Iraqi defense minister Ja'far al-'Askari argued that no foreign power would respect Iraq's sovereignty as long as a British air garrison remained.¹⁰⁵ Even worse, the pan-Arabists argued, the air bases provided France with a pretext to continue its military occupation of Syria, a move that would thwart the monarchy's ambitious plans for Fertile Crescent unity.¹⁰⁶

Beyond their significance as a link in Britain's imperial air route from the Cairo to Karachi, the Air Ministry argued that the air bases were an important check against Ibn Saud's expansionist aims in the Gulf, or a Turkish threat to Mosul. More importantly,

¹⁰⁴ Yasin al-Hashimi's views on the airbases are expressed in the nationalist newspaper, *Al-Ikha al-Watani*, 1 March 1934. The extent of popular anti-British sentiment during this time, particularly in Baghdad, should also not be underestimated. At the showing of a film entitled "Tell England" in Baghdad, which depicted the battle of Gallipoli, the Arab audience cheered each time a British soldier was killed. Sloan to Secretary of State, 2 December 1931, US State Department Records on Iraq, Internal Affairs, Series 890G.00/167.

¹⁰⁵ Note on conversation with Ja'far Pasha, 19 March 1930, Anglo-Iraq relations, CO 730/151/18 in de L. Rush, ed., *Records of Iraq*, Vol. 5, 455.

¹⁰⁶ Daniel Silverfarb, *Britain's Informal Empire in the Middle East: A Case Study of Iraq, 1929-1941* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 25. It is important also to note that British authorities repeatedly blocked Faysal's early attempts at union with Syria, particularly after the 1925 uprising, on the pretext that such a move would antagonize the Kurds. Masalha, 679-693.

perhaps, British officials emphasized that the two RAF airbases served as a “silent, but none the less vital, deterrent” against a Shi‘i or Kurdish insurrection.¹⁰⁷ The Air Ministry pointed out that the Iraqi army, in 1930, numbered only 9,000 troops and possessed no airpower. Such a force could hardly be expected to prevent or contain serious outbreaks of disorder.¹⁰⁸ While Britain was prevented by Article Six of the Anglo-Iraq Treaty for being legally responsible for Iraq’s *internal* security following its independence, the air bases could facilitate a swift British intervention in the event that an outside power decided to exploit Iraq’s domestic disorder. Furthermore, at a debate in the House of Commons, British officials recognized that:

It will be difficult to define precisely in a country like Iraq the line which separates external aggression from internal disorder. Certainly up in the frontiers, in the Mosul *vilayet*, it will be difficult to decide exactly the difference.¹⁰⁹

The Iraqi government’s dependence on RAF to quash internal dissent thus provided British with a lever for securing the kingdom’s cooperation following its nominal independence. In 1929, for instance, as the termination of the mandate approached, High Commissioner Dobbs predicted the imminent collapse of Iraq’s internal security:

There will be a complete cessation of payment of revenues and tribal area taxes in the Euphrates and Kurdish area, as well as increase of brigandage and rise of tribes. When the tribes rise and revenue has failed, the *Iraqis will demand the help of the RAF. We must refrain until they admit formally that they must collaborate with us and then we will step into the arena again with increased reputation.*¹¹⁰ (italics added)

¹⁰⁷ Note on conversation with Ja‘far Pasha, 19 March 1930, Anglo-Iraq relations, CO 730/151/18 in de L. Rush, ed., *Records of Iraq*, Vol. 5, 456.

¹⁰⁸ Silverfarb, 24.

¹⁰⁹ Testimony of Captain Wallace before the House of Commons, 23 July 1931 in Great Britain, Parliament, House of Commons, *Parliamentary Debates* (London: HMSO, 1931), 1802-1803.

¹¹⁰ Dobbs to Shuckburgh, 28 December, 1929, CO 730/172/68593, cited in Liora Lukitz, *Iraq: The Search for National Identity* (London: Frank Cass, 1995), 19-20.

Faced with what amounted to blackmail from the British, the ex-Sharifian officers intended to use the suppression of internal dissent by the young Iraqi army as a means to buttress their arguments against the continued presence of the airbases. A strong performance by the Iraqi army against the Kurds, preferably with as little help as possible from the RAF, would inevitably strengthen the Iraqi position in future negotiations with Britain over the removal of the airbases.¹¹¹

The Sulaymania Riots and More Revolts

Mounting tension in the north in the face of continued intransigence from Baghdad would offer just such an opportunity. Confronted with the strong possibility of an armed uprising in the north and a string of petitions from the Kurdish nationalists to Geneva, Britain's top advisor in Iraq, Kinahan Cornwallis, sent the Iraqi minister of the interior a strongly-worded memorandum in April 1930. The letter urged the immediate establishment of a Local Language Law--a measure that would implement Kurdish-language secondary school instruction, provide for Kurdish courts and policeman, and establish a translation bureau. Symbolically, Cornwallis also called for the incorporation of a Kurdish symbol into the Iraqi flag.¹¹²

Al-Midfa'i responded to these demands by sending the minister of defense, Ja'far al-'Askari on a tour of the Kurdish regions of the north in August, where he made several speeches, giving the impression that the requested measures had already been implemented. He emphasized that:

¹¹¹ By 1934, Yasin al-Hashimi believed that the Iraqi army had progressed sufficiently to control the countryside, and called for an "abolition of aerial bombardment" by the RAF. The maintenance of the airbases, he argued, was "inconsistent with Iraq's independence." Cited in "Al-Hashimi Pasha Explains the Political Situation in the Country," *Al-Ikha al-Watani*, 1 March 1934.

¹¹² Sluglett, *Britain in Iraq*, 187. The text of the Local Language Law is in the Colonial Office's *Report for 1931*(London: HMSO, 1931), Appendix E, 74.

The Iraqi government fully appreciates the extent to which they are bound, as an enlightened government, to recognize the fact that, for an important part of Iraq, Kurdish and not Arabic is the mother language.¹¹³

In the course of the tour, a group of Kurdish notables submitted petitions to the British demanding complete independence. Al-Midfa'i's reaction was swift; he ordered the immediate arrest of a popular Kurdish *mutassarif*, or provincial governor, the detention of those Kurdish notables who had written petitions to the League, the appointment of an Arab Commandant of Police in Sulaymania, and the inauguration of a vigorous policy in dealing with Kurdish chieftains, religious notables, and civil servants who favored separation.¹¹⁴ "Certain unbalanced and hot-headed persons," he wrote in a memorandum, "have recently started intriguing, spreading harmful propaganda, and indulging in other activities calculated to promote the dismemberment of the united Iraqi state."¹¹⁵ By later sending the Iraqi army into Sulaymania, ostensibly to enforce Kurdish participation in new provincial elections, he provoked an outbreak of widespread rioting, where at least thirteen civilians were killed by Iraqi troops on 6 September.¹¹⁶

The Sulaymania incident was a significant turning point in the struggle between the Kurds and the state during the mandate. It eroded the remaining power of the Kurdish moderates and brought back Shaykh Mahmud into Kurdish politics. From across the border in Iran, the tribal chief had returned in late October to the cheers of the Kurdish nationalists, who welcomed his militant cries for a separate state as the only viable response to Baghdad's intransigence. Among those joining his movement were

¹¹³ *The Baghdad Times*, 9 August 1930.

¹¹⁴ Ministry of the Interior, Baghdad, Cornwallis to al-Midfa'i (Very Secret) No. SI/509, 19 August 1930, in Jarman, ed., *Political Diaries*, Vol. 5, 241.

¹¹⁵ Translation of Ministry of Interior Very Secret Letter, No. C/2691 18 August 1930, to the Secretariat of the Council of Ministers in Jarman, ed., *Political Diaries*, Vol. 5, 239.

¹¹⁶ The Residency, Baghdad, Intelligence Report (Secret), No. 19, 15 September 1930, in Jarman, ed., *Political Diaries*, Vol. 5, 252-254.

several Kurdish officers from the Iraqi army.¹¹⁷ Faced with yet another revolt, the army was dispatched to the north where, from October to March 1931, it was unable to compel Mahmud's surrender.

Throughout the campaign, the government's semi-official newspaper, *al-'Iraq*, circulated rumors that the revolt was yet another attempt by British political officers to bloody Iraq's nose and delay its entry into the League.¹¹⁸ Such arguments were given credence by the well-known fact that British political officers had never officially abandoned their contacts with Shaykh Mahmud during his exile on the Persian border.¹¹⁹ Even King Faysal expressed his suspicions that British advisors were deliberately obstructing the Iraqi army's campaign against the Kurds, while Nuri argued that Iraqi troops "were handicapped in dealing with the rebels by the necessity of observing 'European methods' [trial, witnesses, etc] instead of being able to inflict summary punishment."¹²⁰ Nuri's call for the declaration of martial law throughout the Kurdish *liwas* met with stout opposition from his British advisors, who argued that such draconian measures would further inflame Kurdish sentiment against the government and provide more eager recruits to Shaykh Mahmud's revolt.¹²¹ By March 1931, the revolt had a spread beyond Sulaymania to every *liwa* in the former Mosul *vilayet*. Mahmud's tribal irregulars had tied down three-quarters of the Iraqi army in the mountainous north,

¹¹⁷ Sloan to Secretary of State, "Election Disturbances: Serious Riots in Sulaimania," 15 September 1930, US State Department Records on Iraq, Internal Affairs, Series 890G.00/131.

¹¹⁸ Al-Hasani, "Harakat Shaykh Mahmud," *Ta'rikh al-Wizarat*, Vol. 3, 120-122. The Residency, Baghdad, Intelligence Report No. 15, 21 July 1930, in Jarman, ed., *Political Diaries*, Vol. 5, 206.

¹¹⁹ Sluglett, *Britain in Iraq*, 184.

¹²⁰ "A Conference Held at Residency on July 12th to Discuss Measures to Deal with Shaikh Mahmud's threat to Shah Nadir," CO 730/163/5. 144637, cited in Ali, 425.

¹²¹ Ludith-Hewitt, "Report by Air Officer Command Iraq on Operation Against Shaykh Mahmud," CO 730/183/6, cited in Ali, 426.

prompting the Iraqi general staff to make a grudging appeal to the British High Commissioner for RAF intervention.¹²²

It was a humiliating lesson in the realities of mountain warfare in the north, one that would prompt the new government to expend large portions of its limited budget on the acquisition of an indigenous air force. Every government employee was later required to donate a third of each month's salary toward a special fund for the purchase of aircraft, while the towns of Basra, Baghdad, and Mosul held special fundraising drives for the development of an Iraqi air force.¹²³ Predictably, RAF officials confessed "considerable doubt as to whether a native air force can ever be made efficient."¹²⁴ Meanwhile, more substantial investments by the Iraqi government in rural infrastructure--measures that might have addressed the economic and social roots of Kurdish unrest--went neglected.

Britain, until mid-1931, had delayed in offering the use of its aircraft, partly out of concern that a bombing campaign in the Kurdish north would antagonize the local populace, but also out of a belief that such tactics would attract unwanted attention from the League of Nations on the eve of the mandate's termination.¹²⁵ Nevertheless, the RAF was eventually dispatched and the revolt was swiftly suppressed. "You are the people who have broken my spirit," Mahmud reportedly said to an RAF officer upon his surrender.¹²⁶

¹²² Sluglett, *Britain in Iraq*, 200.

¹²³ Sloan to Secretary of State, "Aeroplanes for the Iraqi Army," US State Department Records on Iraq, Internal Affairs, 17 September 1932, 890G.00/215. Also, Silverfarb, 76.

¹²⁴ Air Staff note, "Military Aspects of the Anglo-Iraq Treaty," 2 January 1930, FO 371/14502 in de L. Rush, ed., *Records of Iraq*, Vol. 5, 259.

¹²⁵ "We should try to avoid being portrayed in Geneva as having tried to force a policy on Kurds with bayonets and bombs" from Hall to CO, 18 March 1931, CO 730 163/5, 144637 E1239/3/43, cited in Ali, 421.

¹²⁶ Report on Air Operations, May 1931, Air 5/1292, cited in Sluglett, *Britain in Iraq*, 202.

Despite his capitulation and subsequent exile, the threat of armed revolt in the north had not receded. Mahmud's revolt was replaced by another, almost simultaneous, uprising centered in the town of Barzan, led by Shaykh Ahmed. His insurgency, like that of Mahmud's, was reminder to the Iraqi army of their dependence on British airpower. It dragged on for six months, with Iraqi officers arguing that, were it not for the advice of their British supervisors, the revolt could have been suppressed in the space of a few weeks.¹²⁷ The nationalist press circulated rumors that, once again, Britain was trying to obstruct an effective Iraqi military campaign against the revolt to convince the government that "Kurdistan was too powerful to be handled by the Iraqi army."¹²⁸ Although Ahmed's revolt was eventually suppressed through a scorched-earth policy by Iraqi troops and a bombing campaign by the RAF, it was not the end of armed dissent in the Kurdish north. Another revolt by Kurdish chief Khalil Khoshawi would last until 1936.¹²⁹ In the 1940s, Ahmed's brother, Mulla Mustafa Barzani, would once again mobilize the tribes and secure the backing of the urban Kurdish intelligentsia. It would mark the start of protracted campaign that would continue to jeopardize Iraqi stability throughout the 20th century.

The End of the Mandate

The termination of the Ahmed revolt, combined with British assurances to Turkey and Iran that the Iraqi government had established a measure of control over its Kurdish population, marked the termination of the mandate in October 1932. To placate League concerns over the future of the Kurds in the wake of the recent revolts, the monarchy

¹²⁷ Sloan to Secretary of State, 19 December 1931, US State Department Records on Iraq, Internal Affairs, Series 890G.00/170.

¹²⁸ *Confidential US Diplomatic Post Records*, Ser. No. 172, 2 June 1932, "The Campaign against Shaykh Ahmed and Public Opinion."

¹²⁹ McDowell, 180.

implemented a series of last-minute, superficial concessions. Faysal called for the creation of a palace guard in Baghdad, comprised solely of Kurds, to demonstrate his trust in their loyalty to the throne.¹³⁰ Christians and Jews in government posts were quickly re-designated as “Kurds” in official statistical reports to the League. The minister of interior implemented a water-down version of the promised Local Language Law; he decreed that schoolteachers at the kindergarten level in Kurdish districts were to be Kurds, but teachers at other levels would be Arabs.¹³¹ These stop-gap measures, together with Britain’s verbal assurances before the Permanent Mandates Commission, were enough to convince the League that the kingdom had sufficiently progressed as a viable nation-state, and that it could guarantee for its minorities the mechanisms of self-expression and political representation.

Ultimately, however, the rules of the game imposed by the League of Nations on Iraq failed to exert any influence on its fulfillment of earlier promises for Kurdish cultural autonomy. The League structure became, in essence, a playing field upon which the monarchy and the ex-Sharifians struggled to challenge Britain’s influence in the country by evading concessions to the Kurds and suppressing Kurdish dissent through military force.

Conclusion

This chapter has sought to examine the struggle of between the Iraqi state and the Kurds in the context of British imperial control from 1919-1932. From 1919 to 1925, Britain endeavored to secure the Mosul province from Turkish control and deliberately cultivated Kurdish nationalism as a buffer against Kemalist encroachment. It subsidized

¹³⁰ US Embassy Baghdad, “King Faysal and the Kurds,” Dispatch No. 281, 3 September 1932, US State Department Records on Iraq, Internal Affairs, Series 890G.000.

¹³¹ McDowell, 177; Sluglett, *Britain in Iraq*, 211.

Kurdish tribal leaders, most notably Shaykh Mahmud, who would later present significant obstacles to Iraqi state-building.

With the award of the Mosul province, the League--with British endorsement--forced the Iraqi government into certain linguistic and educational concessions to the Kurdish population in the north. These measures, although less threatening than Britain's previous support for a Kurdish buffer state, came at a time when Iraqi Arabists under the leadership of Sati' al-Husri, Yasin al-Hashimi and the ex-Sharifians were attempting to consolidate their control and challenge British influence. The ideological basis for the new state as articulated by Sati' al-Husri left little space for expressions of Kurdish identity as demanded by the League.

The classroom thus became a key battleground where the Iraqi Arabists challenged Kurdish demands for autonomy, as well as the unwelcome influence of their British sympathizers over state affairs. This struggle found further expression as a military contest between the ex-Sharifian officers and the British, where the suppression of Kurdish armed dissent in the north became a means to liberate the army and the state from British tutelage. By 1932, the ex-Sharifians had secured the formal termination of the mandate and had temporarily silenced Kurdish dissent through the application of military force. Yet the northern province remained dangerously underdeveloped and state control over its population was tenuous at best.

Continued resistance by the Kurds to Baghdad's rule reflects, therefore, a broader failure by the ex-Sharifians in the state-building enterprise during the 1920s and 30s. Although successful in confronting British pressure over Kurdish autonomy, establishing the kingdom's nominal independence, and safeguarding its borders, the ex-Sharifians

failed to develop a more encompassing, inclusive national ideology—perhaps a form of “Iraqism” that would have proven more amenable to the state’s Kurdish-speaking population. Believing that Kurdish dissent could be met solely through military force, they rejected more comprehensive economic and social reforms in the northern province that might have, in the long term, undercut the power of the militant Kurdish tribal leaders and stabilized the country. Instead, the Kurds would launch another, more serious revolt in the 1940s, one that would fatally weaken the monarchy and contribute to its overthrow in 1958.

In the meantime, the ex-Sharifians had set the stage by for their own consolidation of power in Iraq, to be aided by a counter-insurgency campaign against the pro-British Assyrian population in 1933.

CHAPTER TWO

The Assyrian Revolt of 1933

Introduction

In July 1933, the prominent ex-Sharifian nationalist party, *al-Hizb al-Watani*, published a stern appeal to Prime Minister Rashid ‘Ali addressing the issue of the country’s Assyrian Christian minority. “The best remedy for this disease,” the letter argued, “is to expel them promptly to avoid turmoil and disorder.”¹ Less than a month later, the nascent Iraqi army carried out a massacre of several Assyrian villages in northern Iraq. This seminal event in Iraqi history, known as the “Assyrian Affair,” sent shock waves throughout the international community, eroded Britain’s influence in Iraq, and galvanized Iraqi public opinion in favor of the ex-Sharifians’ anti-imperialist agenda.

Most literature on the Assyrian question in Iraq has been highly partisan and has focused almost exclusively on the details of the massacre—specifically, the culpability of the Iraqi government or the intransigence of the Assyrians. These studies all assume the existence of a rigid, primordial Assyrian identity that precluded the integration of the community into the new Iraqi state.² The Assyrian community is often described—with such terms as “aloof” and “unassimilable”—as an ossified relic of the Ottoman *millet* system whose patriarchal leadership was inherently incompatible with the requirements of the “modern” nation-state of Iraq. Besides denying the Assyrians the ability to

¹ Council of the League of Nations, *Official Journal*, 14 (December 1933), 1808.

² For the argument that Britain ‘abandoned’ the Assyrians to the fate of the Iraqi state, see Stafford, op. cit. and Yusuf Malik, *The British Betrayal of the Assyrians* (Warren Point NJ: Kimball Press, 1935). Khaldun S. Husry, “The Assyrian Affair of 1933” (Parts I & II), *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 5 (April 1974 and June 1974) attempts to exonerate Bakr Sidqi and the Iraqi army. Irrespective of their stance, these authors seem to oversimplify the communal roots of Assyrian opposition to assimilation; they ignore the influence of Assyrian elite politics, British policy, and the utility of the Assyrians to Iraqi nationalists. In addition to these accounts, Hanna Batatu paints the Assyrian community as “a foreign and unassimilable people,” without providing any context or reasons. Batatu, 869.

redefine their place in the new political order, these interpretations also ignore the important effects of Assyrian dissent on Iraqi state-formation.

This chapter therefore seeks to analyze how the Assyrian community resisted the pressures of Iraqi centralization by seeking British protection. Like the previous chapter, it will also address the impact of such a strategy on political and ideological developments in Baghdad. More specifically, it will emphasize how the suppression of the Assyrian revolt became a critical instrument in the ex-Sharifians' consolidation of power and their attempts to remove British influence from the newly-independent state.

I will first examine how British colonial officials, influenced by orientalist conceptions of the Assyrians as an embattled minority, deliberately fostered Assyrian notions of autonomy. Seeking to buttress their control of the Iraqi countryside, they recruited the Assyrians into an armed auxiliary force known as the Levies. Service in the Levies, besides exacerbating inter-ethnic tensions in northern Iraq, left the Assyrian community increasingly isolated from the rest of the country. Most importantly, the Assyrian Levies enabled the ex-Sharifians to depict the *entire* Assyrian community as lackeys of the British who threatened the integrity of the state.

Having established the important effects of British patronage on the Assyrians' political status, this chapter will then consider the relationship between the Assyrian patriarch and Baghdad. Encouraged by British partiality, the patriarch demanded the creation of an autonomous enclave in northern Iraq, completely exempt from Baghdad's political control. Similarly, he employed the League's vocabulary of self-determination as a tool to preserve his traditional authority and undermine his political opponents among the Assyrian elite.

Finally, I will explore the impact of such demands on Iraq's political development. For the ex-Sharifians, Assyrian agitation on the eve of the mandate's termination presented an even greater threat to their power than Kurdish demands for linguistic autonomy. An armed Assyrian enclave in the north, they believed, would pose a dangerous obstacle to the state's monopolization of violence and the consolidation of its territory. Even worse, such audacity might encourage other ethnic groups to resist the government's authority in a similar manner.

Beyond these tangible dangers to the state, it is important to consider how the Assyrian problem had a certain instrumentality for a particular faction within the ex-Sharifian bloc. In a sense, the Assyrians became a manufactured enemy whose suppression enabled Iraqi officials to deflect internal criticism and advance their agenda of centralization and conscription. Even more than Kurdish dissent, quashing the Assyrian "revolt" became a means for the ex-Sharifians to strike a blow at Britain and demonstrate the credibility of the new Iraqi army.

But before we examine these important elements in the relationship between the Assyrians and the state, it is helpful to briefly highlight the evolution of the community's identity prior to World War I—focusing specifically on Western influences.

Assyrian Identity and the Western Imagination

Known variously as Nestorians, Chaldeans, or the Church of the East, the Assyrians are Syriac-speaking Christians whose doctrine originated in teachings of the fifth century patriarch Nestorius amidst great theological controversy.³ Persecuted by the Byzantines, they later fled the Mongol invasions of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries

³ The terminology applied to the community has been the subject of acrimonious debate. See J.F. Coakley, *The Church of the East and the Church of England: A History of the Archbishop of Canterbury's Assyrian Mission* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 4-5.

to settle near present-day Mosul and in the Urmia region of Persia. Until the end of World War I, the largest concentration of Assyrians was found in the mountainous Hakkari region of eastern Turkey.⁴ This area, together with northern Iraq, continues to be viewed by many in the Assyrian diaspora as the community's historic homeland.

Yet territorial attachment itself does not explain the evolution of Assyrian identity. Beginning in the 1830s, European missionary activity, racial theories, and travel narratives had a major impact on the community's self-perception and its relationship with neighboring Muslims and foreign powers. Anglican and American Protestant missionaries, arriving in Hakkari in the 1830s, viewed the Assyrians as potential collaborators in the proselytizing enterprise. Writing in 1833, the Anglican missionary Eli Smith hoped that the community would become "a prop upon which to rest the lever that will overturn the whole system of Mohammedan illusion."⁵

By accepting the patronage of foreign missionaries, the Assyrian patriarch—known as the Mar Shimun—sought to enhance his prestige in relation to the Ottoman Porte and neighboring Kurdish *aghás*. Remarking on this client-patron relationship, the Kurdish leader Shaykh Ubayd Allah asked a Turkish officer in 1881, "What is this I hear...that the Nestorians are going to hoist the British flag and declare themselves British subjects?"⁶ Foreign support thus created a local imbalance of power and fostered the growing independence of Assyrian tenants from their Kurdish landlords—developments that probably served as a catalyst for the massacre of Assyrian villages by Kurds in 1843. Yet the practice of seeking external support continued among the Assyrian elite

⁴ For more excellent background on the Assyrians, see also John Joseph, *The Nestorians and their Muslim Neighbors: A Study of Western Influence on their Relations* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961), 28-34.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 44.

⁶ McDowell, 57.

throughout the nineteenth century and would become a major irritant for the Iraqi government during the mandate period.

In addition to the influence of foreign missionaries, the archeological discovery of Nineveh helped transform the Assyrian community's political identity. Galvanizing the Western imagination, the excavations of 1842 and 1845 led European travel writers and archaeologists to discern physical similarities between the modern Nestorians and the monumental sculptures unearthed at Nineveh. The archeologist A.H. Layard argued that the Nestorian Christians "are indeed as much the remains of Nineveh, and Assyria, as the rude heaps and ruined palaces." Travel writer J.P. Fletcher believed the local Christians were "the only surviving memorial of Assyria and Babylonia."⁷

Although contrary to ethnographic evidence, this narrative gave the Assyrians a primordial attachment to the territory of northern Iraq. It was gradually adopted by the Assyrian community and later used by the Assyrian elite to refute the claims of the ex-Sharifians that the Assyrians were mere refugees in Iraq, entitled to no special privileges.⁸ The word "Assyrian" entered into currency among the Nestorian Christians as a term of self-definition soon after the archaeological discoveries.⁹ Assyrian diaspora communities in the United States and elsewhere began using images of ancient Assyrian reliefs on their letterhead—a trend which continues today among the Assyrian "internet

⁷ Quoted in Joseph, 13.

⁸ A. D'Amato, *The Assyrian Case for Autonomy* (Chicago: Bet-Nahrain Democratic Party, 1982); available from <http://www.bet-nahrain.com>; accessed 2 December 2000. Also, Joseph, 13-22. For a discussion of Assyrian territorial identity, particularly among the diaspora, see Madawai Al-Rasheed, *Iraqi Assyrian Christians in London: The Construction of Ethnicity* (Lewiston, UK: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2000), 111-114.

⁹ A.H. Layard's assistant at Nineveh was a local Chaldean Christian, Hormuzd Rassam, who would later become one of the most vocal spokesmen for Assyrian autonomy in northern Iraq. See, Hormuzd Rassam, *Asshur and the Land of Nimrod* (Cincinnati: Curts and Jennings, 1897).

community.”¹⁰ Foreign missionaries helped propagate this heritage among the Assyrians and publicized it to an international audience during the interwar period.¹¹ Ultimately, this somewhat romantic conception of the community as the last vestiges of a vanished civilization influenced British partiality in Iraq towards the Assyrians. It was an attitude that explicitly encouraged Assyrian aspirations for territorial autonomy in Iraq following World War I.

British Patronage

The symbiotic relationship between British colonial administrators and their Assyrian clients arose from the peculiar refugee status of the Assyrians following World War I. Emboldened by promises of Russian support, the Assyrian patriarch declared war on the Ottoman Empire in 1915. By the end of the war, the Assyrians in the Urmiah region had suffered staggering losses from Turkish army offensives and attacks by local Kurds. In 1918, nearly 70,000 Assyrians began a perilous 300-mile trek to seek protection at a British base at Hamadan in western Iran. During this journey, it is estimated that nearly 20,000 Assyrians perished from starvation, exposure, and marauding attacks by Iranians, Kurds, and Turks. Unable to fully accommodate these destitute refugees, British authorities transferred the surviving Assyrians to a British-sponsored refugee camp in Iraq at Ba’quba, forty miles north of Baghdad.¹²

Upon assuming the mandate in Iraq, British officials faced serious challenges from tribal disaffection and a perceived Kemalist threat from Turkey. As discussed

¹⁰ See for example www.nineveh.com or www.aina.org. On the top of the Assyrian national flag is the standard of King Sargon, founder of the first Assyrian empire.

¹¹ One prominent example is W.A. Wigram, *The Assyrians and their Neighbours* (London: G. Bell & Sons, 1929) and *Our Smallest Ally* (London: G. Bell & Sons, 1920).

¹² Stafford, 30-35. Also, Joseph, 137-144. Assyrian accounts are contained in Abraham Yohannan, *The Death of a Nation, or the Ever-Persecuted Nestorians or Assyrian Christians* (New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1916), W.W. Rockwell, *The Pitiful Plight of the Assyrian Christians in Persia and Kurdistan* (New York: American Committee for Armenian and Syrian Relief, 1916).

previously, the British developed a unique strategy of indirect rule to suppress these disturbances while at the same time minimizing the burdensome costs of empire. Britain's method of policing the mandate relied heavily on the use of local proxies, backed up by the authority and firepower of the Royal Air Force. Viewing the Assyrian refugees at Ba'quba as an ideal recruiting pool, British army officers in 1919 began inducting the Assyrians into a British-officered military force known as the Levies.¹³

British partiality toward the employment of Assyrian Christians as imperial allies stemmed in large measure from the colonial theory of the "martial races."¹⁴ As practiced in India and Africa, this peculiar European belief held that certain ethnic groups or sects--Gurkhas and Berbers for example--were better suited to soldiering and warfare.¹⁵ British officers saw the Assyrian men of the Ba'quba refugee camp as a "hardy, virile race," whose adaptability to military life surpassed that of the settled Arab townsmen or even the Kurdish tribes.¹⁶ According to the Colonial Office's appraisal of Assyrian soldiers in a 1921 report: "Led by British officers, they are a native force second to none...their quickness in picking up discipline and their mettle in battle has surprised and delighted all who have been concerned with them."¹⁷ In addition to their martial prowess and experience in mountain fighting, British reports praised the Assyrians for their "high standard of morality" and drew attention to the virtual absence of venereal disease among

¹³ *The London Times*, "Training the Assyrians," 24 April 1920. Originally founded in 1915, the Levies were initially comprised of Arabs, Kurds, and Turkomans, yet by 1921 the British had begun to recruit almost entirely from the Assyrian community. Brigadier-General J. Gilbert Browne, *The Iraq Levies* (London: Royal United Service Institution, 1932), 1-15.

¹⁴ The French, it should be mentioned, employed a similar force of locally-recruited minorities to aid their control of mandate Syria. N.E. Bou-Nacklie, "Les Troupes Speciales: Religious and Ethnic Recruitment, 1916-1946," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 25 (1993), 645-660.

¹⁵ David Killingray, "Guardians of Empire," in *Guardians of Empire: The Armed Forces of the Colonial Powers c. 1700-1964*, eds. David Killingray and David Omissi (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999), 14.

¹⁶ United Kingdom, Colonial Office, *Report on the Administration of Iraq, October 1920-March 1922* (London: HMSO, 1922), 69.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 110.

the Levies, compared to the significantly higher rates among Kurds and Arab townspeople.¹⁸

A more visible sign of British partiality was the outfitting of the Levies in British military uniforms. The effect that these distinctive uniforms had on transforming the Assyrians from a group of armed “irregulars” into a more official arm of British policy should not be underestimated. They signified Britain’s recognition that the Assyrians were perhaps less “oriental” and more worthy of trust than their Arab and Kurdish neighbors. More importantly, they altered the self-perception of the Assyrian community by visibly linking the Levies to the British government. For the Iraqi Arab populace and the Kurds, these uniforms served as a continued reminder of British domination.¹⁹

Emboldened by their uniforms, higher pay, and superior training, the Assyrian Levies often derided and ridiculed the Arabs of the Iraqi army. What British officials mildly termed “*esprit de corps*” was perceived by Iraqi Arabs as haughtiness and, in many cases, blatant racism.²⁰ Frequent contact with Royal Air Force and British army officers undoubtedly influenced Assyrian notions of distinctiveness and autonomy. In 1923, Gertrude Bell wrote that British officers were “constantly reminding the Levies that they’re good British soldiers, not dirty little Arabs.”²¹

Aside from this preferential treatment, the decision by British authorities to let Assyrian soldiers keep their rifles and 200 rounds of ammunition following their discharge from the Levies played a critical role in the community’s subsequent

¹⁸ United Kingdom, Colonial Office, *Report by His Britannic Majesty’s Government to the Council of the League of Nations on the Administration of Iraq for the Period April 1923-December 1924* (London: HMSO, 1925), 39.

¹⁹ Husry, “The Assyrian Affair of 1933 (I),” 166.

²⁰ United Kingdom, Colonial Office, *Special Report by His Majesty’s Government in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the Council of the League of Nations on the Progress of Iraq during the period 1920-1931* (London: HMSO, 1931), 268.

²¹ Quoted in Husry, 165.

confrontation with the emerging Iraqi state. In the eyes of Iraqi nationalists, particularly after the termination of the British mandate, the presence of armed Christians in the north presented a dire threat to the centralizing power of the new government. Assyrian men, however, viewed the retention of arms as a vital means to protect their families from neighboring Kurds and an essential condition of their service in the Levies.

In addition to its lenient arms policy, Britain's use of the Levies in the suppression of dissident uprisings in Iraq branded the Assyrians as imperial collaborators in the eyes of Iraqi nationalists. During the 1920 revolt in Iraq--a rare instance of cooperation among Shi'is, Kurds, and Sunnis--the Assyrian community aided British efforts to restore order and quell the uprising. Iraqi nationalists from the Mosul branch of *al-Ahd al-'Iraqi* issued a manifesto to the Assyrians in May 1920 urging them to join the revolt and ignore British attempts to foment discord among the Iraqi populace.²² Dismissing this appeal, the Assyrian Levies proved to be a formidable bulwark against nascent Iraqi anti-imperialism. The British view of the Assyrians' utility in suppressing the 1920 revolt is reflected in the remarks of the British commander, General Haldane, who wrote that without the support of the Levies, "a large portion of the Mosul Division might have been swamped in the wave of anarchy."²³ Such gratitude was not unnoticed by the Assyrians; as late as 1945, an Assyrian petition for an autonomous enclave in

²² Eliezer Tauber, *The Formation of Modern Syria and Iraq* (Portland OR: Frank Cass, 1995), 263.

²³ Draft by Mr. Ward for the High Commissioner, Baghdad in 1933, "Historical Summary of the Development of the Assyrian Question in Iraq" Part I, 1914-1925, FO 371/16894 in de L. Rush, ed., *Records of Iraq*, Vol. 3, 498.

northern Iraq cited the valuable service the Levies had rendered in preserving British rule against internal dissent.²⁴

Employment of the Assyrian Levies as a counter-insurgent force also exacerbated tensions between the Kurdish and Assyrian communities in northern Iraq. Since the 1920 uprising, the Levies were used almost exclusively against the proto-nationalist revolts of Kurdish leader Shaykh Mahmud, earning them the enduring enmity of the Kurdish tribes. Tension with the Kurds culminated in the Kirkuk disturbances of May 1924, where a group of Assyrian soldiers killed nearly forty Kurds after a dispute over prices with a local shopkeeper.²⁵ Since the Levies were under entirely separate jurisdiction from the Iraqi army, a British courts martial handled the criminal prosecution of the case.²⁶ The tribunal found nine Assyrians guilty, yet it later pardoned them and failed to launch an exhaustive inquiry.²⁷ Provoking outrage in the Iraqi nationalist press, Britain's lenient response to the Kirkuk incident deepened the hatred of the Assyrians by both Kurds and the Iraqi nationalists.²⁸ If the Kurdish chiefs and the ex-Sharifians were at odds on virtually every other issue, they were ultimately united by a shared enmity toward the Assyrian Levies.

More importantly than the suppression of internal Kurdish unrest, Britain employed the Assyrians as a buffer against Kemalist attacks from Turkey, beginning with

²⁴ *Assyrian National Petition*, Presented to the World Security Conference, San Francisco, California USA on 7 May 1945; available from http://www.atour.com/Assyrian_Nation.html; accessed on 2 December 2000.

²⁵ Brigadier Browne, a former British commander of the Levies, offers a version sympathetic to the Assyrians: "Already there had been a certain amount of back-chat between the townspeople and the Assyrians, in which the former, seeing the greater part of the Battalion moving out, threatened to deal with the Assyrian women when they had gone. Matters were in fact very tense. Many people in the town were in sympathy with Sheik Mahmud. At 9:30 on May 4th there was a disturbance in the bazaar. An Assyrian soldier returned wounded, after a dispute over the price of an article in a shop." Browne, 35-37.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 21.

²⁷ Stafford, 47.

²⁸ The Iraqi account of the Kirkuk incident is contained in al-Hasani, "Hawadith Ijramiyya," *Ta'rikh al-Wizarat*, Vol. 3, 236. Also, Stafford, 68.

a major military operation at Rowanduz in 1921. As the previous chapter has established, the British realized by the early-1920s that the Kurdish tribal chiefs--Shaykh Mahmud, in particular--were fickle allies in the war against the Kemalists. Unlike the Kurds, the Assyrians constituted a more loyal, more dependable buffer force, one that could be relied upon to resist the Kemalists' inducements of money, arms, and pan-Islamic propaganda. Familiar with the local terrain, they consistently outperformed their counterparts in the Iraqi Arab army, whose involvement was often regarded as a liability by British military advisors. Sir Percy Cox believed that the Assyrians' armed presence on the northern frontier was "the main reason which induced the Kemalists to abandon their projected attack."²⁹

By serving as an armed deterrent against the Kemalists, the Assyrians enabled Britain to preserve its interests in the Mosul province during frontier negotiations with Turkey and the League of Nations. In 1924, the British initially used the Assyrian refugee population under its protection as an argument for the inclusion of the Hakkari province within the mandate of Iraq. When this failed, Britain pressed for the Mosul *vilayet*, again citing its concern for the Assyrians. Thinly disguising its interest in the oil deposits of the Mosul region, the British Colonial Office Report to the League of Nations states:

The advantages to the Assyrians and to the Iraqi State alike, in securing a frontier that would include these areas in Iraq (Amadia, Dohuk, and Aqra) are obvious. The Assyrians for their part, would share in the benefit of British advice and assistance offered by the present Treaty...Instead of Turkish rule, they would be in Arab hands, who apart from any influence exercised by Great Britain, have shown themselves benevolent to Christian communities. The Iraq Government, on its

²⁹ Ibid., 110.

side, would see its frontier garrisoned by a race of sturdy mountaineers whose vital interests were involved in resisting attack from the north.³⁰

A League of Nations commission, convinced that the majority of the inhabitants of the Mosul region preferred British over Turkish rule, awarded the Mosul *vilayet* to Iraq. Yet the bulk of the territory formerly inhabited by the Assyrians was allotted to Turkey.³¹ This decision created a new political context for Assyrian ambitions by officially precluding the return of the community to their former homes in Hakkari. The fate of the Assyrians within the kingdom became increasingly uncertain, prompting both the League of Nations and the British to devote considerable energy to resolving the settlement of the refugees. Such attention would encourage the patriarch to redefine Assyrian communal identity in more political terms—a transformation that would prove tremendously threatening to the ex-Sharifians.

Preserving “Ancient Privilege”: The Assyrian Patriarch

Various schemes for the settlement of the Assyrians had been proposed by the British; none worked. As early as January 1919, British officials sought to reward the Assyrians for their service against rebellious Kurds by creating an Assyrian enclave in the Amadia district near Mosul. To make room for the Assyrians, the British planned to eject the Kurds from the area, yet the outbreak of the 1920 revolt prevented the implementation of this ill-conceived scheme. In 1921, the refugee camp at Ba’quba was closed and funds were distributed for the Assyrians to settle in the Dohuk and Aqra area.

³⁰ United Kingdom, Colonial Office, *Report on the Administration of Iraq, April 1923-December 1924*, 20.

³¹ Phebe Marr, *A Modern History of Iraq*, (Boulder CO: Westview Press, 1985), 43.

Many Assyrians drifted across the border to their old homeland to Hakkari, only to be turned away by Turkish authorities in September 1924.³²

With the passage of the Iraq Nationality Law of 1924, Assyrians in northern Iraq were no longer regarded as temporary refugees, but Iraqi citizens. In response to this important legislation and Turkish opposition to the return of the refugees, the League of Nations demanded a set of guarantees from the Iraqi government regarding the political and religious rights of the Assyrian community. The League's report for 1924 states:

We feel it our duty, however, to point out that the Assyrians should be guaranteed the re-establishment of the *ancient privileges* which they possessed in practice, if not officially, before the war. Which ever may be the sovereign State, it ought to grant these Assyrians a certain local autonomy, recognizing their right to appoint their own officials and contenting itself with a tribute from them, paid through the agency of their Patriarch.³³ (italics added)

By endorsing what it perceived to be the patriarch's "ancient privileges," the League emboldened the Assyrian elite to resist the centralizing power of the nascent Iraqi state. Perhaps unknowingly, the League had adopted a narrative that did not necessarily correspond to the realities of Assyrian political life, but rather one that served the interests of the patriarch. The temporal authority which the Mar Shimun and the League claimed were primordial and "ancient," were in fact the result of recent changes in the community's political status and, most importantly, the support of yet another foreign patron.

British patronage revived and inflated the temporal authority of the Mar Shimun and the Assyrian aristocracy--known as *maliks*--which had waned during the wartime

³² United Kingdom, Colonial Office, *Special Report on the Progress of Iraq, 1920-1931*, 266-279.

³³ Quoted in *Ibid.*, 269-70.

dislocation of the community.³⁴ When the British sought to recruit the Assyrians for service in the Levies after the war, they purposefully cultivated the *political* authority of the Mar Shimun and the *malik* elite. Acting as convenient intermediaries for the British, the patriarchal family organized recruiting campaigns among the destitute Assyrian refugees. Most *maliks* and their sons received commissions as officers.³⁵ Because the power of the patriarch depended to a large extent upon the geographic concentration of the community, he saw the Levies as an ideal way to strengthen his position in the new Iraqi order.

The impending termination of the mandate, however, threatened to erode these new institutions of power. While Iraqi nationalists opposed the treaty, citing its preservation of British access to Iraq, the Assyrian *maliks* perceived the treaty as paving the way for Sunni Arab domination. For the Assyrian patriarch, the treaty signaled the loss of an important patron, the elimination of the Levies, and the possible dispersal of his community under Kurdish landlords. Adapting to the new political environment, the Mar Shimun sought to preserve the geographic cohesion of his community within the boundaries of Iraq.

The patriarch's efforts to emphasize the homogeneity and autonomy of the Assyrian community culminated in the submission of the Assyrian National Petition to

³⁴ It should be noted that before World War I, the Assyrians of Urmia had developed a flourishing print culture comprised of newspapers and journals. The refugee community in northern Iraq, however, possessed no such proto-nationalist foundation. Many Assyrian intellectuals perished in World War I or during the long trek to Iraq. The task of articulating the basis for statehood in northern Iraq, therefore, was left to the patriarch. Arian Ishaya, "Urmia to Ba'quba: From the Cradle of Water to Wilderness," paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Middle East Studies Association of North America, 18 November 2001, San Francisco, California.

³⁵ United Kingdom, Colonial Office, *Report on the Administration of Iraq, April 1922-March 1923* (London: HMSO, 1924), 52-53.

the League of Nations on 18 June 1932.³⁶ This document--signed by Levy officers, influential *maliks*, and the Mar Shimun--demanded Assyrian self-government in an autonomous enclave within Iraq and threatened a widespread resignation of Levy personnel. By rejecting both the immediate authority of their British officers and the centralizing power of the Iraqi state, the Levies pledged their obedience to the temporal authority of the Mar Shimun. Aptly termed a “mutiny” in British correspondence, the crisis was averted through a combination of British diplomatic persuasion and show of force. The Levies renounced their threatened resignation, pledged to refrain from future political activity, and promised to wait until December for a decision from the League of Nations Permanent Mandates Commission.³⁷

The National Petition was a significant attempt to redefine Assyrian identity in the context of the Iraqi state, yet it hardly represented a broad consensus among the community about its place in the new political order. Rather, it was the product of a rising trend of factionalism within the Assyrian ranks. An opposition movement to the Mar Shimun had begun as early as 1930, with significant numbers of lower-ranking Assyrians willing to assimilate into Iraqi society according to the wishes of the Iraqi government.³⁸ At its core, the National Petition was an attempt by elite supporters of the Mar Shimun to forestall the dispersal of the community by combining the language of “ancient privilege” with the fashionable vocabulary of self-determination. After the

³⁶ Text of the petition is found in Yusuf Malik, *The Assyrian Tragedy* (Annemasse, Granchamp, 1934), 28.

³⁷ “Manifesto of the Levies” cited in Robin Bidwell, ed., *British Documents on Foreign Affairs: Reports and Papers from the Foreign Office Confidential Print, Part II, Series B, Turkey, Iran, and the Middle East, 1918- 1939* (Frederick, MD: University Publications of America, 1985), Vol. 9, 389.

³⁸ Air Vice Marshall C.S. Burnett, “Report on Events in Connexion with Assyrian Situation, June 28, 1933.” *Ibid.*, 389. Also, Fuccaro, *The Other Kurds: Yazidis in Colonial Iraq* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1999), 161.

independence of Iraq in October 1932, this reconstituted Assyrian identity proved to be patently intolerable to the ex-Sharifians and the fragile Iraqi government.

The Iraqi Nationalists' Response

Demands for an autonomous enclave in the country populated by armed Assyrians presented an almost existential challenge to the Iraqi government. Yet its immediate response to the Assyrian National Petition of June 1932 reflects a division of opinion about the Assyrian issue, as well as deep fissures within the Iraqi power structure. The prime minister at the time, Nuri al-Sa‘id, adopted a hardline posture and condemned the policy that Iraq had previously pursued towards the Assyrians as too lenient—“a reason for them to put forward demands, most of which are unreasonable.”³⁹ With Iraq on the verge of attaining its full independence, Nuri was understandably nervous that expressions of Assyrian dissent would tarnish the country’s image abroad and possibly jeopardize its admission to the League of Nations.⁴⁰ Like other ex-Sharifians, he believed that the Iraqi government had already gone far enough in recognizing the patriarch’s *spiritual* authority and paying him a monthly stipend out of the government treasury.⁴¹

King Faysal, on the other hand, called for continued moderation toward the Assyrians. Although he did not concede completely to the demands of the Mar Shimun, he was willing to set up a *waqf* for the building and upkeep of Assyrian churches, and offered to grant a block of land for the Assyrians in southern Iraq.⁴² Ultimately, however,

³⁹ Quoted in Joseph, 196.

⁴⁰ League of Nations *Official Journal*, 13 (December 1932), 2291-2292.

⁴¹ Al-Hasani, “Mawqif al-Athuriyyin min al-Hakuma al-Iraqiyya,” *Ta’rikh al-Wizarat*, Vol. 3, 239.

⁴² Memorandum from Major Wilson to Advisor, Ministry of the Interior, Baghdad 28 August 1932. Bidwell, Vol. 9, 236.

Faysal's more conciliatory approach to the Assyrian issue would become a source of great unpopularity.

On 15 December 1932, the League of Nations rejected the National Petition's demand for administrative autonomy and urged the Iraqi government to facilitate the settlement of the Assyrians within Iraq. While the ex-Sharifians were undoubtedly relieved at the League's decision, they grew increasingly frustrated at the Mar Shimun's obstructionist posture. Refusing to cooperate with the British-appointed land settlement officer, Major Thomson, the patriarch argued that a "solution of the problem cannot be formed in the carrying out of any plan that is entirely left to the discretion of (the) Iraqi Government and the 'foreign expert' appointed by it."⁴³

Angered by this intransigence, the Iraqi government summoned the patriarch to Baghdad and presented him with an ultimatum. In the eyes of the ex-Sharifians, the Mar Shimun's open defiance of government authority would have a dangerous effect on the country's security if not firmly addressed. Iraqi minister of the interior Hikmat Sulayman demanded, therefore, that the patriarch sign a written oath of loyalty on 28 May 1933. The text of the oath reveals the extent of the Iraqi government's frustration toward the Assyrian problem:

I Mar Shimun...do hereby promise that I will never do anything which may be an obstacle to the duties of Major Thomson and the Government of Iraq...that I will always and in every way remain one of the most faithful subjects of His Majesty the Great King.⁴⁴

Refusing to sign this oath, the patriarch was placed under house arrest by Hikmat Sulayman. King Faysal, in London at the time, opposed this measure, arguing that if the Mar Shimun was detained against his will, Assyrian resentment would spark a full-blown

⁴³ Quoted in Stafford, 210-212.

⁴⁴ Royal Government of Iraq, *Correspondence Relating to the Assyrian Settlement*, 18.

insurgency. Both Iraq's internal security and its international standing, Faysal feared, would be jeopardized.⁴⁵ Yet this accommodating viewpoint did not prevail.

In response to Faysal's appeal, the new prime minister, Rashid 'Ali, claimed that the return of the Mar Shimun to the Mosul province without any commitment to respect Baghdad's authority would encourage further discord in the north and weaken the control of the center over the periphery. At a time when the government was facing a serious revolt from the Kurdish chief Shaykh Ahmed Barzani, the prime minister believed that a mishandling of the Assyrian threat would inflame Kurdish sentiment and encourage more resistance.⁴⁶ What was needed was a firm exhibition of state power; an indication of the government's capacity to extend its discipline to the farthest reaches of its territory. Such a measure would have the additional benefit of helping Rashid 'Ali's ex-Sharifian faction consolidate its power and marginalize its rivals.

Having formed a new Iraqi government only two months before the Mar Shimun was summoned to Baghdad, Rashid 'Ali's *Hizb al-Ikha* (led by Yasin al-Hashimi) held a tenuous grasp on power. The party had come under fire from its former allies, the *Hizb al-Watani*, for its recognition of the Anglo-Iraq Treaty of 1930—widely viewed as a traitorous concession to British demands.⁴⁷ On 23 November 1930, the two parties had agreed to oppose the ratification of the treaty and pledged to never join any government that upheld its provisions. Yet in March 1933, a new *Ikha* government was formed at

⁴⁵ Letter from King Faysal to Prime Minister Rashid 'Ali, 25 June 1933, in al-Hasani, "Tawqif al-Mar Shimun," *Ta'rikh al-Wizarat*, Vol. 3, 251.

⁴⁶ Letter from Prime Minister Rashid 'Ali to King Faysal, 26 June 1933, in *Ibid.*, 252.

⁴⁷ Led by the Shi'i politician Ja'far Abu al-Timman, the *Hizb al-Watani* was staunchly anti-British and included a large number of Shi'is within its ranks. Nakash, 118.

Faysal's request, with no conditions or demands for a any revision of the 1930 Treaty.⁴⁸

Sensing that it could play the anti-imperialist card to discredit this powerful bloc of Sunni politicians, the *Hizb al-Watani* launched a venomous attack in the media, denouncing the *Ikha* party as traitors to Iraqi sovereignty.⁴⁹ With its nationalist credentials under attack, the *Ikha* government needed a way to re-establish its legitimacy, divert public attention, and restore relations with the *Watani* party. Assyrian demands for autonomy provided this opportunity.⁵⁰ In the months preceding the massacre of August 1933, Rashid 'Ali and Hikmat Sulayman waged a coordinated press campaign intended to incite popular resentment toward the Assyrians and, indirectly, their British patrons.

On the eve of the massacre, popular outrage toward the Assyrians had reached a fever pitch. Perhaps the greatest source of loathing was the issue of the Levies. As has been mentioned, the creation of the Levies presented a challenge to the nascent Iraqi army, which Iraqi nationalists such as Sati' al-Husri and Yasin al-Hashimi viewed as the embodiment of the country's national strength.⁵¹ Britain's purpose in maintaining the Assyrian Levies, these figures argued, was to prevent the expansion of an indigenous Iraqi army and thereby weaken the state. As early 1923, the nationalist newspaper *al-*

⁴⁸ The *Ikha* government was comprised of: Rashid 'Ali as prime minister, Yasin al-Hashimi as minister of finance, and Hikmat Sulayman as minister of the interior, Nuri al-Sa'id as foreign minister. All were Sunni Arab, ex-Sharifian officers.

⁴⁹ Hasani, "Mawqf Hizb al-Watani," *Ta'rikh al-Wizarat*, Vol. 3, 218. The *Ikha/Watani* rift should also be viewed in the context of a rising trend of Sunni/Shi'i tension following the publication of a controversial book, "Arabism on the Scales" by a Sunni government employee, that accused the Shi'is of disloyalty to the state during the 1920 insurrection. This will be discussed in the next chapter. See, Mr. Ogilvie-Forbes, Baghdad, to Foreign Office, London, 7 and 22 June 1933; Extract from RAF Intelligence Summary from September 1933, paras 596 – 593, FO 371/16923 in de L. Rush, ed., *Records of Iraq*, Vol. 7, 57. Also, al-Hasani, "Al-'Uruba fi al-Mizan," *Ta'rikh al-Wizarat*, Vol. 3, 220.

⁵⁰ Majid Khadduri, *Independent Iraq: A Study in Iraqi Politics since 1932* (London: Oxford University Press, 1951), 44-45.

⁵¹ Reeva Simon, *Iraq Between the Two World Wars: the Creation and Implementation of a Nationalist Ideology* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 117-118.

Asimah called for the disbandment of the Assyrian Levies and the addition of an equivalent number of men to the Iraqi army.⁵²

Feelings of professional rivalry and jealousy by Iraqi army officers toward the British-sponsored Assyrian Levies were also a major source of resentment. As General Rowan-Robinson, head of the British Military Mission in Baghdad stated, the Iraqis, “have always feared as well as hated the Assyrians. They have continually heard the British broadcast the superiority of the latter over the Arabs as soldiers.”⁵³ The 30 July 1933 edition of *al-Ahali* editorialized on Britain’s support for the Assyrians as imperial proxies:

We do not agree that our country should alone remain a field for mischief-making and a toy in the hands of foreigners. Britain should be made to understand that the policy of ‘divide and rule,’ which she pursued in the past, is a policy of the past.⁵⁴

Other newspapers, such as *al-Istiqlal* and *al-Ikha al-Watani*, echoed this sentiment, arguing that Britain deliberately fostered unrest and disaffection among the Assyrians as a way to keep Iraq weak.⁵⁵ International concern for the plight of the Assyrians, the nationalists argued, was simply a ploy by the “imperialist press” to discredit Iraq on the eve of its independence.⁵⁶ Such anti-imperial fervor was not confined to Iraq; the Palestinian newspaper *Falastin* argued that Britain played an active role in fomenting the Assyrian “uprising” against the government.⁵⁷ Nationalists in Syria offered to donate a

⁵² Acting High Commissioner, Baghdad, to Colonial Secretary, London, 20 June 1923 CO 730/40 in de L. Rush, ed., *Records of Iraq*, Vol. 3, 451.

⁵³ Tarbush, 99.

⁵⁴ Memorandum from Ogilvie-Forbes to Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Baghdad, “Iraqi Press,” 1 August 1933. Bidwell, Vol. 9, 198.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ al-Hasani, “Barqiya Thaniya ila al-‘Asbah,” *Ta’rikh al-Wizarat*, Vol. 3, 266.

⁵⁷ Memorandum from US Consulate, Jerusalem to Sloan, Baghdad, 8 September 1933, US State Department Records on Iraq, Internal Affairs, Series 820G.4016, Assyrians/100.

tank and an airplane (named “Southern Syria”) to the Iraqi army to confront the Assyrians.⁵⁸

In addition to its press campaign, the Iraqi government attempted to foster a split between prominent Assyrian *maliks* and the Mar Shimun. On 10 July 1933, the Iraqi government *mutassarif* for Mosul called a meeting of Assyrian *maliks* to reiterate once more the government’s policy of rejecting the patriarch’s demands for temporal authority. “You who are present, and who are older than he,” the *mutassarif* urged the attendees, “should advise him to submit to the Government.”⁵⁹ This important speech also contained a veiled threat of government retaliation against continued Assyrian intransigence:

The long patience of the Government towards some of the Assyrians of fractious temperament and the leniency shown to them, despite their deviation from the lawful path, is only founded on feelings of humanity towards parties of refugees who have settled in its country. But this does not mean that the Government will remain lenient further, since those ungrateful persons who continue misleading do not deserve to receive good.⁶⁰

At this meeting, Lieutenant Colonel R.S. Stafford, the British Administrative Inspector for Mosul, urged the Assyrians to learn Arabic, assimilate into Iraqi society, and “get rid of the present spirit of aloofness.” Given Britain’s previous policy of supporting Assyrian autonomy through the maintenance of the Levies, such directives represent a surprising *volte face*. Nevertheless, Stafford also intimated that Assyrian men might be able to avoid assimilation by moving to Syria and serving in France’s colonial army.⁶¹

⁵⁸ Telegram from Knabenshue to Secretary of State, 4 September 1933, US State Department Records on Iraq, Internal Affairs, Series 890G.00.

⁵⁹ Council of the League of Nations, *Official Journal*, 14 (December 1933), 1804.

⁶⁰ Royal Government of Iraq, *Correspondence Relating to the Assyrian Settlement*, 42.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 44.

Possibly in response to this suggestion, an armed group of 800 pro-patriarch Assyrians led by Malik Yaku, a former officer in the Levies, crossed the Tigris River into Syria. Having left their children and wives behind, this group later protested to the League of Nations that it had no warlike intentions.⁶² French authorities forced the Assyrians back across the Tigris, where they skirmished with Iraqi troops who had been dispatched to intercept them.⁶³ Following the death of seventy Iraqi soldiers, an Iraqi force under General Bakr Sidqi carried out a wide scale massacre of an approximately one hundred Assyrian villagers at Dohuk and Zakhu. The worst atrocities were committed at the nearby village of Summeyl on 11 August, where a machine gun company under the command of Ismail Tuhullah, an aide of Bakr Sidqi's, massacred several hundred unarmed Assyrians.⁶⁴

The Utility of the Massacre

The purpose of this chapter is not to debate the extent of Assyrian civilian deaths at Summeyl; the Assyrians claim 3000, while the British cite the figure as no greater than 300. The exact details of the event remain murky, with different versions put forth by various parties--the British, the Iraqis, the Assyrians, foreign missionaries, and the US State Department. Unsurprisingly, each account exhibits a pronounced bias. Following the massacre, for instance, Bagdad sent the League of Nations an account of the "revolt," arguing that casualties among the Assyrians were limited to combatants.⁶⁵ Yet

⁶² Council of the League of Nations, *Official Journal* 14 (December 1933): 1807.

⁶³ The French later conceded that they let the Assyrians keep their firearms, a decision which drew considerable wrath from Faysal and the ex-Sharifians. Telegram from Mr. Ogilvie-Forbes, Bagdad to Foreign Office, London, 7 August 1933, FO 371/16884 in de L. Rush, ed., *Records of Iraq*, Vol. 7, 561. Also, al-Hasani, "Al-Hijra ila Suriya", *Ta'rikh al-Wizarat*, Vol. 3, 256.

⁶⁴ Marr, *The History of Modern Iraq*, 58.

⁶⁵ Al-Hasani, "Barqiya Thaniyya ila al-'Asbah," *Ta'rikh al-Wizarat*, Vol. 3, 266.

even the most ardent supporter of the Iraqi position, Khaldun S. Husry, admits that this account of events is a “barefaced and clumsy lie.”⁶⁶

Most controversy surrounding the massacre centered on Bakr Sidqi’s responsibility for the massacre and the involvement of the central government in Baghdad. Despite Husry’s arguments to the contrary, historian Majid Khadduri has supplied convincing evidence that Bakr Sidqi ordered the killing, with the implicit consent of the minister of the interior, Hikmat Sulayman and the *Ikha* government.⁶⁷ Assuming the massacre was sanctioned, if not ordered, by the central government, several key questions emerge. How was the event utilized by Iraqi nationalists? What indications does it give us about the growth of nationalism and the process of state-building in Iraq? How did it set a precedent for future relations between the Iraqi government and the country’s various sects and ethnic groups? As historian Mark Levene argues in his study of massacres in history, “A massacre is a statement—less of a state whose power is unfettered, but one whose power is diffused, fragmented, or unsure of itself.”⁶⁸ The Iraqi response to the Assyrian threat should be viewed, therefore, as both an anti-imperialist statement directed at the British and an exhibition of state power by a fragile and immature government.

The triumphant return of Bakr Sidqi’s army provides a revealing glimpse of the popular mood of anti-imperialism following the Assyrian massacre. In the northern town

⁶⁶ I have employed the spelling of the author’s name as it appears in his articles. It should also be noted that he is the son of the nationalist ideologue, Sati’ al-Husri. Husry, “The Assyrian Affair of 1933 (II),” 345.

⁶⁷ Majid Khadduri writes, “While the *Ikha* Government may not have been directly responsible for the massacre of Assyrians, which was mainly the work of General Bakr Sidqi, Hikmat Sulayman declared to the writer that he had approved the general line of policy which General Bakr Sidqi adopted.” Khadduri, 44.

⁶⁸ Mark Levene and Penny Roberts, eds., *The Massacre in History* (New York: Berghahn Books, 1999), 11.

of Mosul, the British consul reported a crowd of Arabs dancing and firing rifles into the air as the Iraqi army marched to the city center. Watermelons strung up on triumphal arches were embedded with knives—a reference to the heads of the defeated Assyrians.⁶⁹ A US embassy dispatch from Baghdad on 30 August describes military parades for the victorious army, soldiers showered with rose water and flowers, and--more ominously--the lynching of a discharged Assyrian Levy officer by an angry crowd.⁷⁰ Leaflets dropped by Iraqi aircraft during the parade welcomed the army as “protectors of the fatherland,” and condemned the Assyrians as “tools and creatures of imperialism.”⁷¹

King Faysal’s son, Crown Prince Ghazi, became the object of popular adulation because of his endorsement of Bakr Sidqi and the *Ikha* government. A common chant in Baghdad movie theaters and other mass gatherings was “Ghazi shook London and made it cry.”⁷² In contrast, the ailing King Faysal watched his prestige plummet due to his moderate stance on the Assyrian issue and his ties to the British.⁷³ Four days prior to his death on 8 September, the US embassy reported “strong indications” that the nationalist ex-Sharifians were planning to force Faysal’s abdication in favor of Crown Prince Ghazi.⁷⁴

The *Ikha* government exploited this new frenzy of nationalist sentiment to push forward several policies. The first was the passage of a bill for mass conscription—a measure which had long been advocated by the ex-Sharifians, but had been previously

⁶⁹ Mr. Ogilvie-Forbes, Baghdad, to Foreign Office, London, 22 August 1933, enclosing letter from Consul Monypenny, Mosul, to Mr. Ogilvie-Forbes, Baghdad, 21 August 1933, FO 372/16888 in de L. Rush, ed., *Records of Iraq*, Vol. 7, 580.

⁷⁰ Knabenshue to Secretary of State, “Iraq’s Victorious Army Returns to Baghdad,” 30 August 1933. US State Department, Records on Iraq, Internal Affairs, Series 890G.4016/Assyrians/89.

⁷¹ Husry, “The Assyrian Affair of 1933 (II),” 352.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Khadduri, 45.

⁷⁴ Knabenshue to Secretary of State, 4 September 1933, US State Department Records on Iraq, Internal Affairs, Series 890G.00/265.

rejected by the British, as well as by the Shi‘i and Kurdish deputies in parliament. In a fiery speech following the massacre, Prime Minister Rashid ‘Ali cited the Assyrian threat as justification for the expansion of the army:

You no doubt now appreciate the country’s need for a regular force to build a strong foundation for our existence...Yes, the Army should be strengthened in order that it should protect our honor. Service in the Army should be made general and compulsory...Every one of us should share in the honor of performing this sacred duty, in order to fulfill the saying, ‘If you wish to be honored, be strong.’⁷⁵

In subsequent months, popular opposition to the implementation of conscription--particularly among the Kurds--disintegrated. In early September 1933, forty-nine Kurdish *aghās* sent a petition to the government urging the adoption of conscription and expressing their thanks to the army for suppressing the “Assyrian insurgents.”⁷⁶ Given previous tensions between the Assyrian and Kurdish communities, this praise is not surprising. What is remarkable is that the Kurdish leaders, traditionally at odds with any government policy of centralization, should openly support the expansion of the Iraqi army. The fact that Bakr Sidqi was of Kurdish origin and that many of the Iraqi troops involved in the massacres were actually Kurdish “irregulars” offers a compelling explanation for this enthusiasm.⁷⁷ The Assyrian massacre thus enabled the ex-Sharifian nationalists to surmount one of the principle barriers to the expansion of the Iraqi army—opposition from the Kurdish chiefs. More importantly, the Assyrian threat provided a common ground of sorts between the ex-Sharifians and the Kurdish chiefs; a way for the

⁷⁵ *Baghdad Times*, 6 September 1933.

⁷⁶ Quoted in Simon “Iraq Between the Two World Wars,” 122.

⁷⁷ Telegram from US Consulate Baghdad to Secretary of State, US State Department, Records on Iraq, Internal, 16 August 1933, Series 890G.105/4. Many of the Kurds were responsible for the subsequent looting of Assyrian villages. Al-Hasani, “Ta’thir al-Haraka ‘ala al-Ra’y al-‘Amm,” *Ta’rikh al-Wizarat*, Vol. 3, 267.

government to co-opt the Kurds and undercut the nationalist appeal of Shaykh Ahmed Barzani.

To a lesser extent, the Assyrian issue also allowed Baghdad to temporarily silence the discontent of the Shi‘i tribes. According to Iraqi historian ‘Abd al-Razzaq al-Hasani, tensions between the Shi‘is and the Sunni-based government had reached a boiling point in the summer of 1933. Large demonstrations erupted in the southern cities of Hilla, Kufa, and Karbala’, partly in response to the publication in late 1932 of a fiercely anti-Shi‘i book by a Sunni government employee.⁷⁸ A British political officer reported a revealing conversation in June with former Prime Minister Naji Shawkat regarding the Assyrian situation:

Oh, that is nothing. What is really serious is the Shi‘i unrest. Perhaps you are not aware that two of the provinces on the Middle Euphrates are entirely without Government and the third and most important, Diwaniyyah...is only half under control.⁷⁹

Yet by August, the paramount *shaykhs* of the Middle Euphrates were reportedly clamoring to enlist their tribesmen in the government’s army to quash the Assyrian insurgency. Many tried to cross the borders of the southern *liwas* to fight the Assyrians themselves. “It was with great difficulty,” al-Hasani relates, “that the Iraqi government had to turn away the march of volunteers.”⁸⁰ Nevertheless, Baghdad was quick to exploit Shi‘i sentiment and skillfully portrayed the suppression of the Assyrian threat as a *jihad* to preserve the sovereignty of the Islamic state.⁸¹

⁷⁸ Al-Hasani, “Ta’thir al-Haraka ‘ala al-Ra’y al-‘Amm,” *Ta’rikh al-Wizarat*, Vol. 3, 267-268. The book, *al-‘Uruba fi al-Mizan* (Arabism on the Scales), accused the Shi‘is of disloyalty to Arabism and sympathy for Persia, and attempted to minimize their role during the 1920 uprising.

⁷⁹ Quoted in Stafford, 162.

⁸⁰ Al-Hasani, “Ta’thir al-Haraka ‘ala al-Ra’y al-‘Amm,” *Ta’rikh al-Wizarat*, Vol. 3, 268.

⁸¹ While not without a certain degree of nationalist hyperbole, al-Hasani’s account of Shi‘i sentiment is corroborated by British sources. See Sir F. Humphreys to Sir John Simon, Annual Report for 1933, 28 March 1934 (Confidential), in Jarman, ed., *Political Diaries*, Vol. 6, 97.

With the assent of the Shi‘i and Kurdish deputies, the new government of Jamil al-Midfa‘i passed the conscription bill in February 1934, marking a significant step in the ex-Sharifians’ consolidation of state power in Iraq.⁸² As will be discussed in the next chapter, this watershed event--together with Bakr Sidqi’s reception as a folk hero following the massacre--heralded the subsequent entry of military officers into Iraqi politics. Conspiring with his longtime ally Hikmat Sulayman, Bakr Sidqi would later overthrow the government of Yasin al-Hashimi in 1936. The army, as a vehicle for personal power, would become a regular feature in Iraq’s unstable political arena for the next half-century.

After the massacres, Britain’s administrative control in Iraq became increasingly untenable under a wave of anti-imperialist and anti-foreign sentiment. Bakr Sidqi’s operations against the Assyrian villages in August were intended as a demonstration of the army’s independence and a rejection of British tutelage. By excluding British officers from the zone of operations, he effectively rebuffed British efforts to control the young Iraqi army.⁸³ Moreover, both prior to and during the campaign against the Assyrians, the nationalist press circulated rumors that British officers not only incited the “rebellion,” but actively aided it.⁸⁴ British airplanes were reportedly observed circling the advancing

⁸² Charles Tripp, *A History of Iraq* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 82.

⁸³ General Headlam, Acting Inspector General, “Report on the Part Taken by the Iraqi Army in the Repression of the Assyrian Rebellion in northern Iraq,” Baghdad, 9 December 1933. Bidwell, Vol. 9, 232.

⁸⁴ Al-Hasani, “Mu’amara ‘ala Salamat al-Dawla.” *Ta’rikh al-Wizarat*, Vol. 122-23. This accusation was not without basis. A former British army officer, Matthew Cope, was working in northern Iraq on behalf of the Iraq Minorities Rescue Committee, a London-based organization founded by Hormuzd Rassam that raised funds for and publicized the plight of the Assyrians, Yazidis, and Kurds. The organization launched numerous petitions to the League of Nations on behalf of Iraq’s minorities. Several Iraqi officials, including the Kurdish *mutassarif* of Sulaymania, Tawfiq Wahabi, were arrested in 1931 for conspiring with Cope against the state. See also, Fuccaro, *The Other Kurds*, 161.

Iraqi army, to pinpoint its location and pass on this intelligence to the Assyrians.⁸⁵ Such perceptions of British complicity became the basis for the ex-Sharifians to later demand the arrest of “foreign intelligence officers” who had fostered subversion among the Assyrians.⁸⁶ As implemented by the government, this policy entailed the execution of those Iraqis suspected of collaboration with British forces in Iraq. It also provided a convenient pretext for the elimination of the *Hizb al-Ikha*’s political opponents.

To the utter surprise of the nationalists, Britain did not come to the aid of its Assyrian clients. A League of Nations enquiry into the massacre, the British believed, might provoke an even stronger outburst of anti-British sentiment or possibly lead to the takeover of government by hardline nationalists. “The apportionment of blame,” the British ambassador argued, “was a barren proceeding.”⁸⁷ The new attitude of Britain toward its former proxies is perhaps best revealed in the comments of the British High Commissioner for Iraq, Sir Francis Humphreys:

The fact must be faced that in this modern world--especially in the East--which has witnessed the growth of national aspirations and the consolidation of the authority of central governments, a minority must conform to the laws of the state.⁸⁸

The “real villain,” Humphreys proclaimed, was the Assyrian patriarch and his “credulous well-wishers in the US and Europe.”⁸⁹

Following the massacre, the British continued their endeavors to find the Assyrians a suitable homeland outside Iraq. In exchange for a large payment by the Iraqi

⁸⁵ Al-Hasani, “Ta’irat Britaniyya” *Ta’rikh al-Wizarat*, Vol. 3, 264.

⁸⁶ *Al-Istiqlal*, September 6, 1933. US State Department Records on Iraq, Internal Affairs, Series 890G.20/28.

⁸⁷ Sir F. Humphreys to Sir John Simon, Annual Report for 1933, 28 March 1934 (Confidential), in Jarman, ed., *Political Diaries*, Vol. 6, 71.

⁸⁸ Memorandum from Sir F. Humphreys to Sir John Simon, Baghdad, 18 May 1934. Bidwell, Vol. 9, 357.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 357.

government, France accepted 1,500 Assyrian men, women, and children into the mandate of Syria.⁹⁰ But by 1937, settlement efforts were abandoned and those Assyrians remaining in Iraq eventually accepted Iraqi citizenship. Two developments undoubtedly hastened this process: the deportation of the Mar Shimun in 1933 and the disbandment of the Levies in 1955.⁹¹ By dismantling the institutions of patriarchal authority and foreign patronage, the Iraqi government effectively removed two important barriers to Assyrian assimilation.⁹²

Conclusion

This chapter has sought to portray the Assyrian crisis as a critical episode in the formation of the Iraqi state and its relationship with Britain. By examining the mobilization of Assyrian dissent from three perspectives--the British colonial administration, the Assyrian religious elite, and the Iraqi nationalists--I have attempted to show how Assyrian “intransigence” had a certain utility for the interests of each group.

Seeking to solidify their control over the northern countryside with as few soldiers as possible, British officials co-opted the Assyrians as an armed auxiliary force. Although the British continually voiced their support for the expansion of Iraqi authority throughout the countryside, their Assyrian policy suggested otherwise. By providing arms, uniforms and an income to the Assyrians, Britain tacitly encouraged Assyrian estrangement from the Iraqi state.

For the Mar Shimun, resisting government centralization and securing British protection was a means to preserve his own power and status in a rapidly changing

⁹⁰ Silverfarb, 46.

⁹¹ The Assyrian Levies would continue to guard Britain’s airbases in Iraq until 1955.

⁹² Yet many of the Assyrian activist organizations among the Assyrian diaspora retain the revanchist aim to establish an independent, autonomous state in northern Iraq. See www.nineveh.com or www.bet-nahrain.com. One site laments, “3000 years of history and the internet is our only home.”

political landscape. Although he failed to secure unanimous support from the Assyrian community, the patriarch's demands for political autonomy were perceived by the ex-Sharifians as a dire threat to the coherence of the Iraqi state. If armed Assyrians were allowed to oppose Baghdad's authority and establish an autonomous enclave, the nationalists asked, might other ethnic groups and religious sects follow suit?

Yet, in many ways, the "Assyrian menace" was an exaggerated product of the *Hisb al-Ikha*'s political insecurity after the termination of the mandate. The suppression of this perceived threat had a certain instrumentality. It became a means, ultimately, for the fragile new government to deflect internal criticism, push forward the conscription bill, and demonstrate its anti-imperial credentials. More importantly, perhaps, Baghdad was able to produce a temporary closing of the ranks among the Shi'is and the Kurds by portraying the Assyrians as a threat to the entire nation.

Beyond its tragic results for the Assyrian community and its subsequent enshrinement in the memory of the diaspora, the massacre of August 1933 has an additional significance for post-mandate Iraqi history. It was instrumental in setting new parameters for political behavior among Iraq's ethnic and religious groups. It demonstrated that the ex-Sharifians were willing to use overwhelming force to subordinate communal loyalties to the identity of the Iraqi state.⁹³ Any group that could

⁹³ In October 1935, an Iraqi government under Yasin al-Hashimi crushed a revolt by the Yazidi Kurds of Jabal Sinjar, who opposed the imposition of conscription. The Iraqi army, led by Bakr Sidqi, reportedly killed over 200 villagers and imposed martial law throughout the region. This incident, in conjunction with subsequent Shi'i uprisings, will be addressed in the next chapter. See Fuccaro, "Ethnicity, State-Formation and Conscription in Postcolonial Iraq: The Case of the Yazidi Kurds of Jabal Sinjar," 559-80.

be depicted in Baghdad as having aligned itself with “foreign” or “imperial” elements could expect a fate similar to that of the Assyrians.⁹⁴

Up to this point, we have seen an almost predictable pattern emerge in the confrontation between the ex-Sharifians and the ethnic groups of northern Iraq. What remains is to compare and contrast the Assyrian and Kurdish cases with that of the Shi‘i tribes of the Middle and Lower Euphrates.

⁹⁴ In this sense, the Assyrian massacres foreshadowed the anti-Jewish *farhud* of 1941 in Baghdad. See Elie Kedourie, “Minorities,” in *The Chatham House Version and other Middle Eastern Studies*, 306-316.

CHAPTER THREE

The Shi‘i Uprisings of 1935-36

Introduction

In previous chapters, we have seen how the suppression of Kurdish and Assyrian dissent was an instrument for the ex-Sharifian bloc to challenge Britain’s influence in the country, consolidate the power of the military, safeguard the tenets of Iraqi Arabism, and erode the political position of their more moderate rivals in Baghdad. Following the Assyrian massacre, which dealt a significant blow to Britain’s position in the country, the locus of communal dissent shifted from the mountainous north to the southern Shi‘i areas of the Middle and Lower Euphrates. With the British presence in Iraq effectively diminished after 1933, fissures within the ex-Sharifian ranks erupted into a series of intrigues and coup attempts—a struggle in which ambitious Sunni politicians wielded the grievances of the Shi‘is as a political weapon.

Unable to attain power through constitutional or electoral means, ex-Sharifian opposition politicians from the *al-Ikha* party, under the leadership of Yasin al-Hashimi, allied themselves with disgruntled Shi‘i tribal *shaykhs* and anti-regime *mujtahids*. Early in 1935, these conspirators deliberately incited a series of Shi‘i tribal rebellions along the Euphrates to discredit and overthrow the government of their rival, ‘Ali Jawdat al-Ayyubi. Once in power, however, the *Ikha* government found it difficult to silence suddenly the forces it had unleashed. Battered by continued revolts in the southern provinces and reluctant to carry out the promises he had made to the Shi‘is in opposition,

al-Hashimi adopted an increasingly dictatorial style of rule that had far-reaching consequences for Iraq's political trajectory.¹

This chapter will therefore examine how the struggle between the Iraqi state and the various segments of urban and tribal Shi'i society created a strong reservoir of sectarian discontent. Specifically, it will uncover why these grievances fuelled the outbreak of armed rebellion among the Shi'i tribes in 1935—an uprising that was cleverly exploited by al-Hashimi's ex-Sharifian faction as a strategy to topple the government. The pursuit of such a tactic in the game of elite politics, which threw Iraq into its worst period of unrest since 1920, had profound implications for the development of the state. It fatally damaged the remaining credibility of the parliamentary structure, weakened the monarchy, left Iraq's minorities increasingly disenfranchised, and paved the way for a period of authoritarian rule under the ex-Sharifian officers.

More importantly, the tribal rebellions of 1935-6 and their subsequent suppression during al-Hashimi's reign created conditions favorable to the entry of Iraqi military officers into politics. Drawing upon their previous victories against the Assyrians and the Kurds, General Bakr Sidqi and the coup plotters of 1936 could argue, not without justification, that the army was the only institution capable of saving the state from the specter of tribal violence and its manipulation in the hands of power-hungry politicians. The seizure of power by Bakr Sidqi in October 1936--an event completely unforeseen by the Shi'is at the time of the 1935 revolt--would drastically alter Iraq's political landscape and set in motion the ultimate demise of the monarchy in 1958.

¹ The most detailed accounts of this episode are contained in Captain A.D. MacDonald, "The Political Developments in 'Iraq Leading Up to the Rising in the Spring of 1935," *Journal of the Royal Central Asia Society* 23 (1936), 27-44; Phebe Marr, "Yasin al-Hashimi: The Rise and Fall of a Nationalist," 279-295; and al-Hasani, *Ta'rikh al-Wizarat*, Vol. 4, 13-72.

The Roots of Shi‘i Resentment Before 1935

Before discussing the events of 1935 and 1936, it is helpful to survey the roots of Shi‘i resentment toward the Iraqi state, in order to understand the raw material from which Yasin al-Hashimi was able to fashion his bid for power. Most importantly, we must distinguish between sources of tribal discontent--stemming from the encroachment of the state into the traditional domain of the landed *shaykhs*--and grievances of a more sectarian nature, usually voiced by the urban Shi‘is and religious elite or *mujtahids*. To what degree did these issues provide a sort of common ground among the disparate elements in Shi‘i society for the revolts of 1935? How were the opposition ex-Sharifians able to play upon these frustrations to spark the uprisings?

Throughout the first half of the mandate, Shi‘i resentment regarding their marginal political status in Iraq stemmed in large measure from a bitter sense of disappointment in the legacy of the 1920 revolt. This seminal event in Iraqi history is typically depicted in nationalist accounts as an epic, cross-sectarian effort to shake off the heavy-handed rule of Britain’s India Office.² Yet the uprising’s suppression by British forces left political power in the hands of the Sunni, urban elite—specifically, Faisal’s coterie of ex-Sharifian officers. Any lingering remnants of the already tenuous alliance between these politicians and the Shi‘i *mujtahids* quickly disintegrated following the revolt. Subsequent Sunni-authored histories of the 1920 revolt attempted to minimize the role of the Shi‘i tribes—some even accused the Shi‘i *mujtahids* of disloyalty to the state

² For example, ‘Abd al-Razzaq al-Hasani, *Al-Thawra al-‘Iraqiyya al-Kubra* (Sidon: Matba‘at al-Irfan, 1952) and Simon, *Iraq Between the Two World Wars*, 51-52. More recently, the propaganda of the Saddam regime has imbued the 1920 revolt with a mythic significance to curry favor with the Arab tribes of the Middle and Lower Euphrates. In one speech to the tribes of the al-Muthanna, the Iraqi president stated, “Just as you are proud of the 1920 revolution while you are leading the Mother of Battles, the grandsons of the weak ones in the Arab homeland will be proud of you after 1,000 years.” Republic of Iraq Radio Network, “Saddam Receives More Tribal Leaders,” (Arabic) 1900 gmt, 2 November 1999, FBIS-NES-1999-1102, 2 November 1999.

and pro-Persian sympathies.³ For the Shi‘i religious elite and tribal *shaykhs*, such charges were especially ironic given the disproportionate role played by the Shi‘i tribes in fighting the British and the important mobilizing appeals of the urban *mujtahids*.⁴ “Have the Shi‘is sacrificed their men, orphaned their children and widowed their wives in order to set up government chairs for the Sunnis on the skulls of their martyrs?” wrote one Shi‘i seminary student in November 1931.⁵

The revolt also left a deep-seated contempt among the Shi‘is toward the British for propping-up the continued hegemony of the ex-Sharifians. “Later generations of Iraqi (Sunni) politicians,” commented one British officer, “may appreciate the gratitude they owe the British for saving them from Shi‘i Najaf.”⁶ Nevertheless, such animosity did not prevent the Shi‘is from actively soliciting British patronage in the late 1920s as a counterweight to what they perceived as a rising trend of Sunni hostility. This important tactic will be addressed shortly.

Following the revolt, in 1921, not a single Shi‘i candidate was listed for any post in the Iraqi provincial government. Over the next 15 years, only three Shi‘i politicians would hold a position in the Iraqi Cabinet.⁷ A partial explanation for this exclusion must be attributed to a proclamation by the Shi‘i *mujtahids* prohibiting any Shi‘is from holding political office under what they considered an unjust government. More significantly, however, the ex-Sharifians--with the backing of Faysal--pursued a policy of curtailing the political influence of the Shi‘is in Baghdad, often cultivating the Kurdish bloc in

³ Al-Hasani, “Al-‘Uruba fi al-Mizan,” *Ta’rikh al-Wizarat*, Vol. 3, 220.

⁴ Amal Vinogradov, “The 1920 Revolt in Iraq Reconsidered: The Role of the Tribes in National Politics,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 3 (1972), 123-39.

⁵ Quoted in Lukitz, 62.

⁶ Quoted in Nakash, 72.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 109.

parliament as a counterweight to the Shi‘i deputies. The paucity of qualified Shi‘is who possessed the necessary credentials of a secular education was frequently cited as further justification for their exclusion from the state bureaucracy.⁸

Seeking to improve their political fortunes, the urban Shi‘is tried to use state education throughout the 1920s as an avenue for upward mobilization. Yet their efforts were repeatedly hampered by the traditional aversion of the *mujtahids* to secular education and, as has been discussed, the towering influence of Sati‘ al-Husri over Iraq’s educational system. Like demands by Kurdish deputies for a Kurdish-based curriculum and provincial schools, al-Husri branded similar requests by the Shi‘is as *shu‘ubiyya* or *ta’ifiyya* (sectarianism)—dangerous manifestations of infidelity to the state and its Arabist ideals.⁹ Although the government reserved the post of minister of education for a Shi‘i, al-Husri repeatedly blocked any attempt to set up provincial schools for the Shi‘is or institute a curriculum that incorporated the teaching of Shi‘i heritage, history, and customs. Moreover, he filled the majority of teaching posts in state schools with Syrian, Sunni graduates of the Ottoman education system.¹⁰

Al-Husri’s neglect of provincial education for the Shi‘is also antagonized the tribal *shaykhs*. In one instance, al-Husri rejected a proposal by Faysal for a school for the children of Shi‘i tribal *shaykhs*. The curriculum of the school was to include the study of Arabic, religion, tribal heritage, and agriculture; yet for al-Husri, such measures contradicted his drive to centralize the state’s institutions and make Baghdad the locus of

⁸ Sluglett, 311.

⁹ Nakash, 111-113.

¹⁰ Reeva Simon, “The Imposition of Nationalism on a Non-Nation State: The Case of Iraq During the Interwar Period, 1921-1941,” 97-99.

political and ideological power.¹¹ By creating a significant grievance shared by both the tribal *shaykhs* and the urban Shi‘is, al-Husri’s education policies must be seen as an important, underlying cause of the 1935 revolt.

In addition to the issue of education, Shi‘i cultivators in the southern region frequently complained about the lack of sufficient irrigation works, unfair property taxes, and substandard medical clinics. The *mujtahids* repeatedly voiced their displeasure about the absence of the Ja‘farite school of law in Iraq’s judicial system and law school.¹² The petition of the prominent Shi‘i cleric Kashif al-Ghita’ offers a representative view:

Article 77 of the (Iraqi) Constitution provides that Judges should be appointed from the sect of the population which form the majority, but (instead) the powers of Judges have been granted to persons who comprise the minority of the population. We demand the enforcement of this Article and request that instruction in Ja‘fari *fiqh* (jurisprudence) be included in the curriculum of the Law School.¹³

Finally, the major tribal *shaykhs* vehemently opposed the government’s attempts to pass the conscription bill—a significant issue that would ultimately light the fuse of the revolt.¹⁴ By tapping into this powerful reservoir of discontent, Yasin al-Hashimi and his *al-Ikha* allies were able to legitimate their bid to overthrow the government in 1935.

¹¹ Nakash, 112.

¹² The Ja‘farite school of jurisprudence is the most prominent legal school among the Shi‘is and derives its name from Abu Ja‘far Muhammad al-Baq and Ja‘far al-Sadiq, the fifth and sixth imams. The major distinction between Shi‘i and Sunni jurisprudence lies in the former’s emphasis on the infallibility of the imam’s opinion and authority. For the Sunni, the consensus of legal scholars is traditionally held as the basis for legal decisions. John Esposito, ed., *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Islam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), Vol. 2, 463-464.

¹³ From the petition, “Demands of the Euphrates Leaders, Submitted to Shaykh Muhammad Husayn al-Kashif al-Ghita for Transmission to the Authorities Concerned,” April 1935, translated and cited in Jarman, ed., *Records of Iraq*, Vol. 7, 410-413.

¹⁴ For a representative list of grievances, see Memorandum from Special Service Officer, Baghdad to Air Staff Intelligence, “List of Grievances,” 19 December 1927, Air 23/432 in de L. Rush, ed., *Records of Iraq*, Vol. 4, 310.

Seeking British Protection

Given the unresolved frustrations of the Shi‘is throughout the mandate period, why were there no sustained attempts at armed insurgency until 1935? One explanation is convincingly presented in the comments of a British political officer in 1927:

The outstanding feature of their attitude at the moment is their determination not to be driven into unconstitutional action. They know that such action would force His Majesty’s Government to assist the (Iraqi) government against them, and they genuinely believe that the government is trying to drive them to revolt.¹⁵

While the *mujtahids* and the lay Shi‘i activists recognized the futility of armed dissent as long as British forces--particular the RAF--buttressed the rule of the ex-Sharifians, they repeatedly issued warnings of another uprising, along the lines of the 1920 revolt, unless their demands for reform were met.¹⁶ In some instances, British advisors feared that the Shi‘is might make good on their threat, particular during periods when the RAF and the Iraqi army were occupied with the suppression of Kurdish unrest in the north. In 1931, a British political officer in the south warned that:

Unless the operations against Shaykh Mahmud were brought to a successful conclusion in the near future, the Shias might take advantage of the fact that a large portion of the Iraqi army was needed in the Kurdish district and actively oppose the Government.¹⁷

Despite such predictions, there were no significant outbreaks of armed revolt throughout the 1920s, owing largely to an important tactic pursued by the British. Since the inception of the mandate, the British skillfully co-opted the landowning tribal *shaykhs* as a counterweight to the ex-Sharifian nationalists, as well as the anti-British *mujtahids*.

¹⁵ High Commissioner for Iraq, B.H. Bourdillon, the Residency, Baghdad, to the Secretary of State for Colonies, 19 December 1927, FO 371/12274/3135 in de L. Rush, ed., *Records of Iraq*, Vol. 4, 244.

¹⁶ One example is “The Voice of Iraq: Proclamation by the Executive Committee of the Shii in Iraq,” Enclosure to Sloan to Secretary of State, 11 February 1932, US State Department Records on Iraq, Internal Affairs, Series 890G.00/179.

¹⁷ US Consulate, Baghdad to Secretary of State, “The Political Situation in Iraq,” 16 April 1936, US State Department Records on Iraq, Internal Affairs, Series 890G.00/145.

By mandating that the Shi‘i tribal *shaykhs* hold a significant portion of the seats in the Constituent Assembly, British administrators effectively split the ranks of the Shi‘i opposition.¹⁸ In addition to the fruits of political office, the British used tax remissions and favorable land settlements as a powerful seduction to entice the *shaykhs* away from any anti-British movement. The nationalist *mujtahids* were thus deprived of a significant manpower base to implement their fiery calls to armed action.

Further eroding the prospects for armed revolt in the 1920s, a growing body of urban lay activists among the Shi‘is attempted to use legitimate, electoral means as a vehicle to voice their grievances against the Sunni-dominated government. This small, yet significant element within the Shi‘i polity believed that the *mujtahids*’ call for boycotting elections and their association with Persia played into the government’s hands and damaged the Shi‘is’s political position.¹⁹ There were, of course, a few localized outbreaks of armed dissent during the 1920s, such as the tribal rebellion among the Bani Huchaym in 1923 and 24, but these were swiftly suppressed.²⁰ They did not represent any type of broader coordination between the *mujtahids*, the major *shaykhs*, or the urban lay activists.

Yet by 1927, a series of incidents forced the disparate, anti-government elements in Shi‘i society to adopt a different tactic. Those urban Shi‘is who did not necessarily respond to the *mujtahids*’ previous appeals were deeply offended at the publication of a government-sponsored school textbook on Islam attacking the Shi‘is.²¹ Several months

¹⁸ Batatu, 101-103; Sluglett, *Britain in Iraq*, 85.

¹⁹ Memorandum from Special Service Officer, Baghdad, to Air Staff Intelligence, “The Shi‘i Situation,” 19 December 1927, Air 23/432 in de L. Rush, ed., *Records of Iraq*, Vol. 4, 310.

²⁰ Sluglett, *Britain in Iraq*, 311.

²¹ The school textbook was entitled, “A History of the Ummayads” and denigrated the character of ‘Ali, while praising Mu‘awiya. Secretariat of H.E. the High Commissioner for Iraq, Intelligence Report (Secret), 3 February 1927 in Jarman, ed., *Political Diaries*, Vol. 4, 362.

later, a young Shi‘i teacher who had published a poem praising Persian culture was summarily dismissed by al-Husri, despite the appeals of the Shi‘i minister of education. The year 1927 also witnessed a concerted government crackdown on the Shi‘i-dominated *al-Nahda* party, culminating in the closure of its newspaper offices.²²

The turning point, however, in this worsening cycle of Sunni-Shi‘i relations was the July 1927 riots in Kadhimayn, in which the Iraqi army fired into a procession of Shi‘is during the annual ‘*Ashura*’ commemoration.²³ The government’s acquittal of the army detachment commander responsible for the shootings and its failure to provide any sort of compensation to the families of those injured or killed sent a powerful shock wave throughout the Shi‘is’ ranks. It convinced many figures among the religious elite, the landowning *shaykhs*, and the urban activists that British protection offered the only defense against a rising wave of Sunni hostility.²⁴

Near the end of 1927, Shi‘i opposition leaders circulated several petitions to the British calling for the establishment of an independent or semi-autonomous state in southern Iraq, to be administered by the British.²⁵ According to British political officer

²² The Residency, Baghdad to Colonial Office, London, 2 September 1927 in de L. Rush, ed., *Records of Iraq*, Vol. 4, 273.

²³ ‘*Ashura*,’ the tenth day of the Muslim month of Muharram, is the date on which the Prophet Muhammad’s grandson, Husayn, was killed by rival Muslims under Mu‘awiya at the Battle of Karbala’ in 680 C.E. For the Shi‘is, who revere Husayn the rightful successor to the Prophet, ‘*Ashura*’ is a period of tremendous mourning and a significant force in the identity of the community. Although its manifestations vary, the festival is traditionally marked by public processions, ritual self-flagellation, and dramatic re-enactments of Husayn’s death. Esposito, *Encyclopedia of Islam*, Vol. 1, 141-142.

²⁴ Dispatch from Acting High Commissioner (B.H. Bourdillon), Baghdad, to Colonial Secretary, London, with appendices, 15 July 1927, Riots at Kadhimain, FO 371/12274, in de L. Rush, ed., *Records of Iraq*, Vol. 4, 232-249.

²⁵ Secretariat for H.E. the High Commissioner for Iraq, Intelligence Report, (Secret), 7 July 1927, in Jarman, ed., *Political Diaries*, Vol. 4, 423. Also, Memorandum from Special Service Officer, Baghdad, to Air Staff Intelligence, “List of Grievances,” 19 December 1927, Air 23/432 in de L. Rush, ed., *Records of Iraq*, Vol. 4, 310. The British response to Shi‘i pleas was unwavering: “Unwise or unjust actions by the Iraq government will almost certainly result in the formulation of a demand for more direct British control...I am tired of explaining to my Shi‘i visitors that such a demand would only embarrass His Majesty’s Government and would be in direct opposition to their present policy.”

C.J. Edmonds, “The movement is decidedly pro-British. Shi‘i are a minority and look to the dominant power to ensure justice for themselves.”²⁶ Most remarkably, the Shi‘i tribal *shaykhs*, with the support of the *mujtahids*, called for the appointment of British officials in the shrine cities of Najaf and Karbala’.²⁷ Given the traditional opposition of the *mujtahids* to letting any non-Muslims into the holy cities, this measure is a telling indication of the level of Shi‘i desperation by the late 1920s. In the opinion of some *mujtahids*, it was more desirable for the Shi‘is to “return to the days of absolute British control than to be placed under the heel of an entirely Sunni administration.”²⁸ Motivations among the Shi‘is for such a strategy are perhaps best gauged in the following plea:

We know we are uneducated and so cannot at present take our proper share in public services. What we want is British control, to save us from Sunni domination, until our sons are educated; then we, who are the real majority, will take our proper place in the government of our country and shall not want British control but merely advice, as you are giving it now.²⁹

Unfortunately, Shi‘i calls for more British supervision in state affairs came at the very moment when the issue of British control in Iraq had reached a boiling point in Baghdad.³⁰ Not surprisingly, the ex-Sharifian nationalists painted the Shi‘is as pliable British lackeys, in addition to Persian proxies. As C.J. Edmonds noted in 1927, “It was suggested that the Shi‘i movement was being fostered by the (British) High

²⁶ Note by C.J. Edmonds, Baghdad, 27 September 1927, “Political Situation,” CO 730/123/10 in de L. Rush, ed., *Records of Iraq*, Vol. 4, 277.

²⁷ Memorandum from Special Service Officer, Baghdad, to Air Staff Intelligence, “The Shi‘i Situation,” 19 December 1927, Air 23/432 in de L. Rush, ed., *Records of Iraq*, Vol. 4, 306.

²⁸ Special Service Officer, Hilla to Air Staff, Baghdad, 2 July 1923, Air 23/453, quoted in Lukitz, 65.

²⁹ High Commissioner for Iraq, B.H. Bourdillon, the Residency, Baghdad, to the Secretary of State for Colonies, 19 December 1927, FO 371/12274 in de L. Rush, ed., *Records of Iraq*, Vol. 4, 243.

³⁰ Sluglett, *Britain in Iraq*, 312.

Commissioner to throw dissension among the Iraqis.”³¹ Politicians in the parliament who wished to discredit their Shi‘i rivals had only to point to their repeated opposition to the passage of a conscription bill—a measure that became a sort of litmus test for national loyalty.³² Instead of improving their political situation, the Shi‘is’ solicitation of British protection had placed them firmly in the unenviable company of the Assyrians and Kurds, who had adopted similar tactics.

Prelude to the Revolt

Britain’s announcement in September 1927 of the impending termination of the mandate dashed the hopes of the Shi‘is for a form of British protectorate in Iraq. In the years preceding Iraq’s independence, the Shi‘is grew increasingly desperate. The publication of the official British and Iraqi census results confirmed their status as a majority in the country, perhaps emboldening them to press their claims for greater representation.³³ In a major shift, the *mujtahids* lifted their previous ban on political participation.³⁴ Adopting a strategy similar to that of the Kurds and the Assyrians, Shi‘i opposition figures launched a series of petitions to the League of Nations. They argued: “We represent more than seventy-percent of the country, according to the British government and Iraqi government census...Throughout the world, the majority rules if the government is a national government.” The document goes on to urge British and Iraqi

³¹ Note by C.J. Edmonds, “Political Situation,” 27 September 1927, CO 730/123 in de L. Rush, *Records of Iraq*, Vol. 4, 276-7.

³² One of the few Shi‘i politicians to occupy a Cabinet position under the monarchy, Minister of Education ‘Abd al-Mahdi, resigned in June 1927 to protest the government’s conscription bill. Secretariat of H.E. the High Commissioner for Iraq, Intelligence Report (Secret), 9 June 1927 in Jarman, ed., *Political Diaries*, Vol. 4, 409.

³³ Lukitz, 65.

³⁴ Note by C.J. Edmonds, “Political Situation,” 27 September 1927, CO 730/123 in de L. Rush, *Records of Iraq*, Vol. 4, 276.

administrators to pay heed to such demands, “lest the occurrence of 1920...be repeated in a more dreadful manner.”³⁵

The ultimate failure of such measures was compounded in 1932 with the publication of the previously-mentioned anti-Shi‘i book by a Sunni government employee that accused the Shi‘is of disloyalty to Arabism and sympathy for Persia. Widely interpreted by the Shi‘is as a regime-sanctioned attack on their political position, the book triggered a wave of protests in both urban and rural areas.³⁶ Although the government was able to placate temporarily this discontent in the midst of the Assyrian crisis, such measures were ultimately tactical. According to the American embassy, several Shi‘i opposition figures saw the Assyrian crisis as a window of opportunity, and reportedly approached a British political officer to ascertain Britain’s reaction in the event of a Shi‘i uprising.³⁷ Ultimately, Britain’s failure to come to the aid of its erstwhile Christian allies must have put a significant damper on any further hopes for British assistance. Even worse, the surge of xenophobic Arabism and militarism triggered by Bakr Sidqi’s crushing of the Assyrians left Shi‘i opposition figures with a profound sense of alarm.³⁸

Faysal’s death in September 1933 was another blow to Shi‘i aspirations and was a major step on the road to revolt. Despite his resolve to block the power of the *mujahids*,

³⁵ “The Voice of Iraq: Proclamation by the Executive Committee of the Shii in Iraq,” Enclosure to Sloan to Secretary of State, 11 February 1932, US State Department Records on Iraq, Internal Affairs, Series 890G.00/179.

³⁶ Al-Hasani, “Al-‘Uruba fi al-Mizan,” *Ta’rikh al-Wizarat*, Vol. 3, 220. Also, Mr. Olgilvie-Forbes, Baghdad to Foreign Office, London, 7 June 1933, FO 371/16923, in de L. Rush, *Records of Iraq*, Vol. 7, 57-8

³⁷ Knabenshue to Secretary of State, “Political Situation in Iraq: The Shiah-Sunni Factor” 23 September 1933, US State Department Records on Iraq, Internal Affairs, Series 890G.00/326.

³⁸ The effects of the government’s crushing of the Assyrian revolt are noted in the memoirs of Shaykh Muhsin Abu Tabikh, one of the major landowning Shi‘i shaykhs and a leader of the 1935 revolt. Muhsin Abu Tabikh, *Muhdhakkirat: Khamsun ‘Aman min Ta’rikh al-Iraq al-Siyasi al-Hadith* (Beirut: al-Mu’sassat al-‘Arabiyya lil-Dirassat wa al-Nashr, 2001), 335.

Faysal was regarded by the Shi‘i tribal *shaykhs* as a nominal ally--a trustworthy arbiter who served as an important counterweight to the more nationalist ex-Sharifians. During his numerous visits to the Euphrates region, the Hashimite king was careful to respect tribal customs and provide a forum for the airing of grievances.³⁹ With Faysal’s succession by Ghazi--his weak, yet vehemently pan-Arabist son-- the landowning tribal *shaykhs* accurately foresaw the imminent erosion of their political status.

Under Ghazi’s reign, the first major issue that precipitated the 1935 revolt was the cancellation of the Gharraf Dam Project. This important episode in post-mandate Iraq brought to the surface the innate contradictions between the competing national priorities of the ex-Sharifians and the Shi‘i opposition. Previous cabinets during King Faysal’s reign had allocated sizeable funds for the construction of a major dam on the Gharraf River that would irrigate wide tracts of tribal land in the predominately Shi‘i areas of Kut and Muntafiq. Yet the cabinet of Prime Minister Jamil al-Midfa‘i, dominated by Sunni ex-Sharifians, voted to divert the funds for the project to support the implementation of conscription. The two Shi‘i ministers on the Cabinet, believing that the project was essential to the economic livelihood of the southern Shi‘is, resigned in protest. Ultimately, the Gharraf Dam issue exposed the primacy of the army, rather than rural development, as a focus for state-building in Iraq. It was a choice that would have far-reaching, detrimental effects on the country’s future stability.⁴⁰

With the death of Faysal and the departure of the British, the ex-Sharifians began a policy of actively curtailing the position of the major landed *shaykhs*. In 1934, the

³⁹ Extract from RAF Intelligence Summary from September 1933, FO 371/16923, in de L. Rush, ed., *Records of Iraq*, Vol. 7, 60.

⁴⁰ For the Gharraf episode see Khadduri, 48-49; Marr, *The Modern History of Iraq*, 62; and al-Hasani, “Istiqlat al-Wizara,” *Ta’rikh al-Wizarat*, Vol. 4, 10-11.

government of Prime Minister ‘Ali Jawdat al-Ayyubi dissolved the parliament. In the new elections, the representation of the major Shi‘i *shaykhs* decreased dramatically. Seats that the British had previously allotted to the Shi‘is were now filled with members of the urban Sunni elite. The ex-Sharifians deliberately excluded those paramount *shaykhs* of the middle Euphrates--particularly from the Diwaniyya and Muntafiq tribes--who had a reputation for challenging the government.⁴¹ Additionally, the government undertook a radical modification of the Tribal Disputes Regulations—the British-inspired legal codes that had given significant judicial power to the rural *shaykhs*.⁴² Symbolically, the government also banned a commemoration of the 1920 revolt by the major tribal *shaykhs* in the Rumaytha district.⁴³

Finally, on 13 January 1934, the Constituent Assembly passed the long-awaited conscription bill, nearly ten years after it had been first introduced. This watershed event was met with an outcry of protest from many Shi‘i *shaykhs*, who accurately interpreted conscription as a move to deprive them of a major bargaining chip—their capacity to challenge the state’s monopoly on violence.⁴⁴ Ironically, several of the bill’s most vociferous opponents--most notably the *shaykh* of the powerful Fatlah tribe, ‘Abd al-Wahid al-Sikkar--had earlier pledged their support for conscription under Faysal’s reign, in exchange for seats as deputies.⁴⁵ Outraged that the ‘Ali Jawdat government had

⁴¹ Khadduri, 50.

⁴² Marr, *Yasin al-Hashimi*, 275-7.

⁴³ Among the tribal areas of southern Iraq, Rumaytha had a tradition of resisting Baghdad’s authority, stemming from its prominent role in the 1920 revolt. Annual Review of Events, 1934, prepared at Air Headquarters, British Forces in Iraq, Hinaidi, January 1935, FO 371/18949 in de L. Rush, ed., *Records of Iraq*, Vol. 7, 304.

⁴⁴ For a description of how the Shi‘is used conscription as a bargaining tool, see Sluglett, *Britain in Iraq*, 312.

⁴⁵ Tarbush, 93.

broken Faysal's promise, these Shi'i figures intended to not only redress the grievances of their tribes, but exact revenge for a personal insult.

In seeking to overturn the power of the major Shi'i *shaykhs* so quickly and abruptly, the 'Ali Jawdat government had made a fatal miscalculation. It had alienated the one segment of Shi'i society capable of translating grievances into armed revolt. Unlike the urban Shi'i politicians or the *mujtahids*, the tribal *shaykhs* possessed the manpower to mount a serious challenge to the state—especially now that the British had openly announced their intention to not deploy the RAF in the event of any "internal unrest."⁴⁶ Even more ominously, Prime Minister 'Ali Jawdat al-Ayyubi had excluded from power an influential clique of ex-Sharifians adept at manipulating communal dissent for personal gain.

***Al-Ikha* Lights the Fuse**

In the new Senate under 'Ali Jawdat al-Ayyubi, only nine out of twenty members were supporters of the powerful *Ikha* party.⁴⁷ This influential bloc of ex-Sharifians, it will be remembered from the Assyrian massacre, was vehemently nationalist and had no reservations about exploiting sectarian and ethnic grievances to consolidate its own power and marginalize its rivals. It is therefore not surprising that such a coterie of politicians, ousted from government, would consciously stoke the embers of discontent among the Shi'i tribes as a strategy to attain power.

Al-Ikha's conspiracy against the government began on 7 December 1934, at a secret nighttime meeting in the house of Hikmat Sulayman, in the outskirts of Baghdad.

⁴⁶ Sir P. Cunliffe-Lister, Colonial Secretary, London, to British Ambassador, London, 28 July 1932, with enclosure regarding employment of the Royal Air Force in Iraq on the coming into force of the Anglo-Iraqi Treaty of 1930, FO 371/16953 in de L. Rush, ed., *Records of Iraq*, Vol. 7, 675-6.

⁴⁷ Tarbush, 103.

Frustrated by their inability to effect any change in the fraudulent election results through peaceful agitation and press attacks, Sulayman and his fellow ex-Sharifian, Rashid 'Ali al-Kaylani, actively courted eight of the major Shi'i tribal *shaykhs*, including 'Abd al-Wahid al-Sikkar and Muhsin abu Tabikh.⁴⁸ Ironically, Yasin al-Hashimi did not initially join in planning the revolt, although he would ultimately reap the greatest benefit from its outcome. At the meeting's conclusion, the participants pledged to overthrow the existing government, but agreed to respect both the office of the monarchy and the constitution, and allow the Shi'i tribes to settle disputes according to their own traditions. Moreover, the plotters refused to participate in any government without the other signatories to the pact.⁴⁹ Abu Tabikh and al-Sikkar, it was agreed, would lead the Shi'i Euphrates tribes in revolt, while Sulayman would travel north, to foment unrest among the Kurds.⁵⁰

It is important to emphasize that plotters initially built the foundations of the 1935 revolt upon an intricate network of personal patronage and tribal loyalties. Yet they succeeded in establishing a facade of legitimacy--a proto-nationalist veneer that would prove instrumental in mobilizing a broader section of Shi'i society. The rallying cry of Shaykh 'Abd al-Wahid al-Sikkar, for instance, was limited to his own Fatliah tribesmen in the Diwaniyya *liwa*. Although he was widely respected for his prominent role in the 1920 revolt, any call to arms to neighboring tribes and the urban Shi'is would most likely fall on deaf ears.⁵¹ Al-Sikkar and his fellow plotters therefore drew up a list of social and political reforms calculated to strike a chord among both the urban and rural Shi'is, thus

⁴⁸ Al-Hasani, "Kayf Jarat al-Intikhabat al-Jadida?" *Ta'rikh al-Wizarat*, Vol. 4, 32.

⁴⁹ Hazim al-Mufti, *Al-'Iraq bayn al-Ahdayn: Yasin al-Hashimi wa Bakr Sidqi* (Baghdad, Maktabat al-Yuqaza al-'Arabiyya, 1990), 46.

⁵⁰ A description of the meeting is also found in Marr, *Yasin al-Hashimi*, 283-284 and Khadduri, 52.

⁵¹ A political officer in the south, Captain A.D. MacDonald, has estimated that nearly 60 percent of the Euphrates tribes resisted al-Sikkar's initial call to arms. MacDonald, 29-30.

expanding the popular base of the revolt. Such a measure, they hoped, would obscure the uprising's underlying motives of tribal self-interest. As one of the tribal plotters, Shaykh Muhsin abu Tabikh, would later argue in his memoirs:

The reasons for our movement against the Ayyubi Cabinet in 1934 were not party, sectarian, or ethnic motives...rather it was a movement arising from our grave circumstances, undertaken in the service of the nation against men who had neglected their duties and ignored the nation's public interests.⁵²

At an important meeting in Najaf on 9 January, the Shi'i tribal *shaykhs* and the Sunni *Ikha* politicians sought the official endorsement of Shaykh Muhammad Husayn Kashif al-Ghita', one of the most influential Shi'i *mujtahids*.⁵³ After much deliberation and under pressure from the eminent Shi'i politician Ja'far Abu al-Timman, Kashif al-Ghita' granted his support to the tribal revolt, submitting a petition of grievances to the government.⁵⁴ Among its demands, the document called for the cancellation of rural land taxes in the south, the teaching of Shi'i jurisprudence in law schools, greater representation in civil service and parliament, and a free Shi'i press.⁵⁵ Furthermore, Kashif al-Ghita' issued an important *fatwa* appealing to the tribes not to fight each other, but instead to rally behind the *Ikha*-inspired revolt.⁵⁶ Through these symbolic gestures, the *mujtahid* gave an air of nationalist legitimacy to a tribal uprising that, in the end, would bear little fruit for the Shi'i religious elite as a whole.

Eager to secure the broadest recognition possible for his revolt, Shaykh 'Abd al-Wahid al-Sikkar took the additional step of contacting US diplomats in Iraq to solicit their political support for the uprising. Remarkably, he also requested that the US

⁵² Author's translation from Abu-Tabikh, 324.

⁵³ Ibid., "Nahnu wa al-'alaqat Kashif al-Ghita'," *Muhdhakkirat*, 320.

⁵⁴ Marr, *Yasin al-Hashimi*, 285.

⁵⁵ MacDonald, 33. Text of the petition with a list of its signatories is reproduced in al-Hasani, "Tahaluf al-Qaba'il," *Ta'rikh al-Wizarat*, Vol. 4, 45-47.

⁵⁶ Text of the Fatwa is in al-Hasani, "Fatwa Diniyya," *Ta'rikh al-Wizarat*, Vol. 4, 50.

embassy pass on a list of Shi‘i grievances to the League of Nations.⁵⁷ Such a tactic, undertaken for narrowly tribal motives rather than a broader cause of Shi‘i nationalism, bears a striking resemblance to the similar efforts of the Mar Shimun or the Kurdish leader, Shaykh Mahmud.

As Hikmat Sulayman and Rashid ‘Ali toured the Shi‘i tribal areas, encouraging the *shaykhs* to stockpile arms and plan for the disruption of the government’s lines of communications, many tribes heeded the call—not necessarily out of solidarity for the *Ikha* politicians, but because they had no desire to see Shaykh ‘Abd al-Wahid al-Sikkar seize the mantle of the Shi‘i cause and secure the fruits of office for himself.⁵⁸ It can be argued that the efforts of the Sunni *Ikha* politicians, however cynical, provided the necessary glue for the 1935 revolt. As the revolt unfolded, these figures--particularly Yasin al-Hashimi--would prove instrumental in shaping its outcome.

The Revolt Unfolds

Sensing the rising trend of Shi‘i opposition in the south and unable to deal with the catastrophic consequences of an unexpected flooding of the Tigris River, the ‘Ali Jawdat Cabinet reluctantly tendered its resignation on 23 February 1935.⁵⁹ King Ghazi offered the post of prime minister to Yasin al-Hashimi, the head of the *Ikha* party, but stipulated that both Hikmat Sulayman and Rashid ‘Ali were prohibited from joining the government.⁶⁰ True to his reputation for fierce loyalty, al-Hashimi rejected the King’s offer, signalling the start of the revolt. The King instead appointed Jamil al-Midfa‘i--an

⁵⁷ Telegram from Knabenshue to Secretary of State, “Political Situation in Iraq,” 4 April 1935, US State Department Records on Iraq, Internal Affairs, Series 890G.00/326.

⁵⁸ MacDonald, 31. Sir Archibald Clark Kerr, Baghdad to Sir John Simon, London, 28 March 1935, FO 371/18953 in de L. Rush, ed., *Records of Iraq*, Vol. 7, 409.

⁵⁹ Al-Hasani, “Istiqlat al-Wizara,” *Ta’rikh al-Wizarat*, Vol. 4, 52.

⁶⁰ Marr, *Yasin al-Hashimi*, 291.

ex-Sharifian himself--as prime minister, who faced the unenviable task of quelling the unrest.⁶¹

The revolt took shape as series of attacks on rural bridges, roads, canals, irrigation pumps, and telegraph lines—tactics intended to impede the access of any punitive expedition and demonstrate the government’s inability to extend its reach into the southern *liwas*.⁶² The state of disorder reached such proportions that Sir Kinahan Cornwallis, a British advisor to the Ministry of Interior, sent a telegram to London warning his superiors that Iraq’s internal stability hung precariously in the balance. The scope of the violence, he argued, approximated that of the 1920 revolt.⁶³ Interestingly, Rashid ‘Ali sent a letter of advice to ‘Abd al-Wahid al-Sikkar, persuading him to avoid tearing up the railroad lines of the southern *liwas*. Having previously met with the British ambassador, Rashid ‘Ali warned him that such a move would compel Britain to invoke Article Five of the Anglo-Iraq Treaty and dispatch the RAF to protect “essential communications” in the country.⁶⁴

It was ultimately the Iraqi government’s military response--or, more accurately, non-response--that facilitated the plot’s success and brought Yasin al-Hashimi to power. First and foremost, Prime Minister Jamil al-Midfa‘i was hesitant to send troops to the south out of fear that such a move would precipitate an uprising in the north.⁶⁵ Initially, the government *mutassarif* for Kirkuk, in northern Iraq, had sent a telegram to Baghdad volunteering army units for the south. Yet General Bakr Sidqi, under the advice of his

⁶¹ Sir F. Humphreys, Baghdad to Sir John Simon, London, 6 March 1935, FO 371/18945 in de L. Rush, ed., *Records of Iraq*, Vol. 7, 403.

⁶² Abu Tabikh, 312-315; MacDonald, 35.

⁶³ Sir Archibald Clark Kerr, Baghdad to Sir John Simon, London, 21 March 1935, FO 371/18945 in de L. Rush, ed., *Records of Iraq*, Vol. 7, 403.

⁶⁴ Marr, *Yasin al-Hashimi*, 292.

⁶⁵ Telegram from Knabenshue to Secretary of State, “Political Situation in Iraq,” 21 March 1935, US State Department Records on Iraq, Internal Affairs, Series 890G.00/325.

longtime ally and *al-Ikha* conspirator, Hikmat Sulayman, sent a nearly simultaneous message indicating that his troops in the north could not be spared due to signs of an imminent Kurdish revolt. To emphasize the unavailability of troops, Hikmat Sulayman traveled to Baghdad to warn C.J. Edmonds, a British advisor to the Iraqi minister of the interior, of the dangers of instability in the north.⁶⁶ A relatively minor Kurdish revolt led by Khalil Khoshawi did in fact break out in the midst of the southern uprising, although Hikmat Sulayman's role in instigating it is unclear.⁶⁷ Nevertheless, British observers could not help but comment on the uprising's fortuitous timing for the *Ikha*-inspired plot:

There is no doubt that it is no coincidence that these manifestations of Kurdish discontent have synchronised with the troubles amongst the Shi'i; both have almost certainly been fomented by the political opponents of the current government.⁶⁸

Ultimately, the government could muster only four battalions of infantry for the southern areas, supported by artillery and a thin reserve of air force reconnaissance planes. 'Abd al-Wahid al-Sikkar's tribe alone, on the other hand, commanded over 30,000 rifles, and boasted a better familiarity with the swampy, marshy terrain.⁶⁹ Compounding the government's tactical predicament, the historian 'Abd al-Razzaq al-Hasani reports several instances where Shi'i conscripts in the Iraqi army, who comprised the majority of the rank and file, refused to open fire on their tribal co-religionists.⁷⁰ Further doubts

⁶⁶ US Consular Dispatch, Baghdad, 5 July 1939, US State Department Records on Iraq, Internal Affairs, Series 890G.00/339, cited in Marr, *Yasin al-Hashimi*, 468.

⁶⁷ US Embassy reports also accuse Hikmat Sulayman of trying to foment unrest in the north. Knabenshue to Secretary of State, "Revolt on the Euphrates," 11 June 1936, US State Department Records on Iraq, Internal Affairs, Series 890G.00/368.

⁶⁸ Extract from Report on Current Situation, Royal Air Force Monthly Intelligence Summary, Hinai, January 1935, FO 371/18949 in de L. Rush, ed., *Records of Iraq*, Vol. 7, 355.

⁶⁹ Telegram from Knabenshue to Secretary of State, "Political Situation in Iraq," 21 March 1935, US State Department Records on Iraq, Internal Affairs, Series 890G.00/325.

⁷⁰ Al-Hasani, "Isti'anat al-Hukuma bi al-Qaba'il" *Ta'rikh al-Wizarat*, Vol. 4, 63.

about the reliability of Iraqi army officers were voiced by British observers, who noticed a strong trend of solidarity for Yasin al-Hashimi's faction among the officer corps.⁷¹

Yet the most significant factor in the government's inability to crush the revolt was the unwillingness of the Chief of Staff, General Taha al-Hashimi, to commit more troops to the south. Given that General Taha was the brother of Yasin al-Hashimi, such a reluctance is hardly surprising. In a letter to Prime Minister Jamil al-Midfa'i, he explained that the government's lack of sufficient reinforcements necessitated a "political solution" to the Shi'i revolt.⁷² This masterful stroke of subterfuge paved the way for the assumption of power by his brother and the *Ikha* bloc—who would present themselves as the country's only solution for a problem that they had been largely responsible for creating. Under Yasin's government, Taha al-Hashimi would fail to show any similar restraint in suppressing sectarian dissent with overwhelming force.⁷³ His involvement in the *Ikha* plot is therefore a revealing indication of just how dangerous the game of intra-elite politics had become. Regardless of its implications for the country's stability or economic development, the specter of communal violence--and its suppression or non-suppression--had become a convenient instrument for amassing political power.

By March 1935, significant numbers of pro-government Shi'i tribes were willing to fight the insurgents, yet al-Midfa'i's government wisely calculated that such a measure would set a dangerous precedent and send the country into an unpredictable spiral of inter-tribal warfare.⁷⁴ In a last ditch-effort, al-Midfa'i dispatched the Iraqi minister of the

⁷¹ Sir Archibald Clark Kerr, Baghdad to Sir John Simon, London, 21 March 1935, FO 371/18945 in de L. Rush, ed., *Records of Iraq*, Vol. 7, 404.

⁷² Al-Hasani, "Ra'is Arkan al-Jaysh Yatakalim," *Ta'rikh al-Wizarat*, Vol. 4, 60.

⁷³ Taha al-Hashimi later supported King Ghazi's decision to place General Bakr Sidqi at the head of a punitive expedition against tribal revolts following Yasin al-Hashimi's ascension to power. Abu Tabikh, 309.

⁷⁴ Al-Hasani, "Isti'anat al-Hukuma bil-Qaba'il," *Ta'rikh al-Wizarat*, Vol. 4, 62.

interior to negotiate with 'Abd al-Wahid al-Sikkar; not surprisingly, Rashid 'Ali had advised the *shaykh* against any compromise with the government.⁷⁵ Backed into a corner, al-Midfa'i resigned, and King Ghazi extended an unconditional offer to Yasin al-Hashimi to form a government of his choosing. Al-Sikkar's Fatlah tribe ceased their destructive attacks in the south, to be followed shortly thereafter by the other major tribes.⁷⁶

Implications of the Revolt

In the aftermath of the uprising's outcome, several questions arise: what were its implications for the Shi'i tribesmen and the *mujtahids*, who had tied their fortunes to the machinations of the Sunni *Ikha* politicians? What of the original list of grievances that had lent an air of legitimacy to the revolt? And, perhaps more importantly, what was its effect on the political trajectory of the state?

Although one of Yasin al-Hashimi's first acts as prime minister was to order the delivery of air-dropped leaflets urging the tribes to turn in their firearms to local army garrisons, he soon discovered that he could not easily switch off the forces he had set in motion.⁷⁷ By demonstrating the power of provincial unrest to challenge the state, the revolt had set a dangerous precedent. At the uprising's conclusion, a delegation of 40 Kurdish *aghás* visited Baghdad from the north for a meeting with the prime minister. According to an account in the government's mouthpiece, *al-Bilad*, the tribal leaders fervently pledged their support to "crush any movement that threatened the unity of

⁷⁵ Al-Hasani, "Safr Wazir al-Dakhiliyya ilal-Firat," *Ta'rikh al-Wizarat*, Vol. 4, 63.

⁷⁶ MacDonald, 36.

⁷⁷ Al-Hasani, "Da'wat al-Qaba'il ilal-qa' al-Silah," *Ta'rikh al-Wizarat*, Vol. 4, 75.

Iraq.”⁷⁸ More accurately, as reported by British sources inside the government, these figures believed that they too could emulate al-Sikkar’s tactic of armed revolt as a means of obtaining concessions from the government. They had therefore come to Baghdad to threaten a similar outbreak of violence if their demands were not met, yet al-Hashimi’s propaganda apparatus had attempted to portray the visit as a show of Kurdish solidarity with the new government—possibly to deter any future aggression by the well-armed Shi‘i tribes.⁷⁹

Once in Baghdad, al-Hashimi and al-Sikkar did little to follow through on the promises of rural development or political reform they had made while in opposition.⁸⁰ Although various sources indicate that al-Hashimi was not opposed to the participation of the Shi‘is in government, he did object to their use of armed dissent as a bargaining chip, undoubtedly fearing that any concessions granted by the government under such pressure would encourage further revolt by the Kurds. Furthermore, al-Hashimi vehemently opposed any recognition of the *mujtahids* as the political representatives of the Iraqi Shi‘is—a concession that threatened his etatist, authoritarian vision for the country’s political future.

During al-Hashimi’s tenure as prime minister, Iraq would move closer to a dictatorship than at any previous time in its modern history. The ex-Sharifian banned all opposition parties and newspapers, implemented mandatory conscription, devoted an enormous proportion of the state’s budget to Iraq’s military, and instituted a notorious

⁷⁸ A government newspaper article describing the *aghās*’ pledges of support is reproduced in al-Hasani, “Wafd min al-Shamal wa Barqiyya Khatira” *Ta’rikh al-Wizarat*, Vol. 4, 78.

⁷⁹ Sir Archibald Clark Kerr to Sir John Simon, Foreign Office, London, 28 March 1935, enclosing copy of Kurdish petition, FO 371/18945 in de L. Rush, ed., *Records of Iraq*, Vol. 7, 544.

⁸⁰ MacDonald, 36. Shaykh ‘Abd al-Wahid al-Sikkar, in particular, had been placated by the Hashimi government through tax remissions. Knabenshue to Secretary of State, “Tribal Rebellion in Rumaita Area,” 16 May 1936, US State Department Records on Iraq, Internal Affairs, Series 890G.00/331.

program of paramilitary youth training, the *Futawwa*, modeled on the Hitler Youth.⁸¹ In several newspaper articles, al-Hashimi was exalted as “the father of his people,” or “the Bismarck of the Arabs,” while in one notable speech he hinted at his readiness to serve as the head of state for the next ten years—an utterance that sent shock waves throughout Iraqi society and diplomatic circles. Ironically, though, al-Hashimi in power reversed the vehement aversion to the British that had defined his rhetoric in opposition. As noted by Sir Archibald Clark Kerr:

But of late a metamorphosis has taken him. It has been sudden and it seems to be complete...it is enough to put on record that we have, I think, in Iraq a new friend who was an old enemy, and from this we may draw some comfort.⁸²

Such a *volte-face* no doubt stemmed from his recognition that he still needed British military assistance to maintain his power, as evidenced by his unsuccessful request for RAF support against the tribal insurrections of mid- and late-1935.⁸³

For the Shi‘is outside the government, al-Hashimi’s tenure was especially onerous. Agriculture, irrigation, land reform, schools, and hospitals in the southern region were of tertiary importance and received scant funding.⁸⁴ Despite the fact that al-Sikkar and his tribal co-conspirators were brought into the government, significant numbers of lesser *shaykhs* were still excluded.⁸⁵ Al-Hashimi expropriated their

⁸¹ For an excellent analysis of Hashimi’s tenure, see Marr, *Yasin al-Hashimi*, 301-69.

⁸² Sir Archibald Clark Kerr, Great Britain, Foreign Office, *Iraq Annual Report* (Confidential), 31 January 1936 in Jarman, ed., *Political Diaries*, Vol. 6, 189.

⁸³ Sir Archibald Clark Kerr, Baghdad to Sir John Simon, London, 22 May 1935, FO 371/18953 in de L. Rush, ed., *Records of Iraq*, Vol. 7, 428. Britain responded that RAF support would be “an undesirable departure from their policy of non-intervention in internal disputes.” Ironically, Yasin al-Hashimi had previously sought to use the suppression of the Kurdish revolts as justification for the removal of British air bases. In 1934, he had argued that the Iraqi army could handle any outbreak of armed revolt without the help of the RAF. Cited in “Al-Hashimi Pasha Explains the Political Situation in the Country,” *Al-Ikha al-Watani*, 1 March 1934.

⁸⁴ Marr, *Yasin al-Hashimi*, 333.

⁸⁵ In co-opting the major *shaykhs*, al-Hashimi had fostered their class identity, as opposed to their sectarian, or even tribal identity. Such a measure effectively split the major tribal *shaykhs* away from the

properties, while upsetting tribal sensitivities during his infrequent visits to the lower Euphrates by refusing to stand when he greeted a landed *shaykh*.⁸⁶ His ban on public processions during the commemoration of 'Ashura'--a measure intended to undercut the mobilizing power of the *mujtahids*--met with a fierce outcry in the urban areas. Clearly, the gamble of the 1935 revolt represented a setback for not only the Shi'is, but Iraqi society as whole.

It is not surprisingly, therefore, that the unfulfilled promises of the *Ikha* conspirators would spark another round of revolts lasting well into 1936. Denouncing the *Ikha* politicians and their Shi'i allies as hypocrites, the opposition *shaykhs* appealed for support from Shaykh Kashif al-Ghita', who was also furious at the new government's sudden indifference to Shi'i affairs.⁸⁷ Immediately following the ascension of al-Hashimi to power on 23 March, Kashif al-Ghita' submitted another petition, backed by the signatures of the leading anti-Sikkar *shaykhs* and former members of the Midfa'i and Ayyubi cabinets. Known as the Pact of the People, this significant document demanded a twelve-point program of reform, including proportional representation in parliament and civil service, better health and education facilities in the south, and improved funding for the *awqaf* or religious endowments.⁸⁸

When the Hashimi government summarily dismissed this appeal, Shi'i tribes allied with Kashif al-Ghita' in the Rumaytha district began tearing up railway lines,

lesser *shaykhs*, as well as the *mujtahids*—a tactic strikingly similar to that pursued by the British. Nakash, 125; Marr, *Yasin al-Hashimi*, 299.

⁸⁶ Knabenshue to Secretary of State, "Military Coup d'Etat in Iraq and Subsequent Developments Pointing to Another Revolt Having Serious Consequences," 24 December 1936, US State Department Records on Iraq, Internal Affairs, Series 890G.00/395.

⁸⁷ Sir Archibald Clark Kerr to Sir John Simon, Foreign Office, London, 2 April 1935, FO 371/18945, in de L. Rush, *Records of Iraq*, Vol. 7, 418.

⁸⁸ Text of petition in Sir Archibald Clark Kerr, British Embassy, Baghdad to Sir John Simon, London, 28 March 1935, FO 371/18945 in de L. Rush, ed., *Records of Iraq*, Vol. 7, 410-13.

destroying telegraph and telephone lines, and attacking government offices.⁸⁹ According to a British political officer dispatched to the area to mediate a solution: “All the *shaykhs* were pledged to support the demands put forward by Kashif al-Ghita’ and must continue to struggle for their acceptance by the Government unless told by the (*mujtahids*) to desist.”⁹⁰ Ironically, then, the leadership of the revolt originally inspired by the Sunni *al-Ikha* had passed to Shaykh Kashif al-Ghita,’ his circle of *mujtahids*, and a small, but influential group of urban Shi‘i lawyers. Al-Hashimi’s government response to such provocations was to launch a fierce campaign of counter-insurgency led by General Bakr Sidqi.

Enter the Military

In sending forth Bakr Sidqi to quell the rebellion of the recalcitrant anti-Sikkar Shi‘i tribes and their *mujtahid* allies, Yasin al-Hashimi had inadvertently sown the seeds of his own demise and laid the foundation for the entry of military officers into Iraqi politics.

Bakr Sidiq’s reputation as a national hero, it will be remembered, was firmly established with his suppression of the Assyrian revolt in 1933. His brutally efficient conduct of the counter-insurgency campaign in the south only elevated his prestige, particularly among the Kurds of the north.⁹¹ Adopting an iron-fist policy similar to his tactics in the Assyrian affair, the Iraqi general instituted martial law throughout the southern *liwas* and unleashed the firepower of Iraq’s expanded air force. According to one observer, he erected a mobile gallows in the back of an army truck for summary

⁸⁹ Tarbush, 109.

⁹⁰ A British political officer quoted in Ibid., 108.

⁹¹ Abu Tabikh, 335. Sir Archibald Clark Kerr, British Embassy to Sir John Simon, London, 29 May 1935 in de L. Rush, *Records of Iraq*, Vol. 7, 430.

executions of tribal dissidents. Entire villages were obliterated through indiscriminate bombardment.⁹² The government's announcement to implement conscription on 12 June 1935 only broadened the scope of the revolt, while its refusal to negotiate with the *mujtahids* signaled its insistence that the insurgents' unconditional surrender was the only acceptable outcome.⁹³ Such an uncompromising posture was a far cry from General Taha al-Hashimi's earlier emphasis on a "political solution."

The revolt's final and complete suppression in mid-1936 had important implications for Iraqi state-formation. First, it completely broke the ability of the tribes to mount an armed challenge to the state.⁹⁴ Furthermore, the *mujtahids* were left increasingly marginalized in terms of their ability to mobilize any dissent against the state.⁹⁵ Most significantly, however, the unfolding of the revolt paved the way for a coup d'etat in 1936 by General Bakr Sidqi.

Despite the devastating efficiency of the counter-insurgency campaign, Bakr Sidqi grew increasingly hostile toward the Hashimi regime. He frequently complained about the government's lack of will in responding to the rebellion, and threatened to resign as a "protest against the Government's lax policy."⁹⁶ In return for preserving the security of the state by quashing the southern revolts, to say nothing of the nearly simultaneous uprising of the Yazidi Kurds in the north, he demanded the post of Chief of the General

⁹² Knabenshue to Secretary of State, "Revolt of the Arab Tribes on the Euphrates," 13 May 1936, US State Department Records on Iraq, Internal Affairs, Series 890G.00/365.

⁹³ Al-Hasani, "Thawra al-Rumaytha al-Ula" *Ta'rikh al-Wizarat*, Vol. 4, 98. By the end of 1935, the new Iraqi Air Force had flown more than 700 hours in missions against tribal dissidents and dropped over 5,678 bombs. Tarbush, 111. Also, Telegram from Knabenshue to Secretary of State, "Tribal Rebellion in Rumaita Area," 16 May 1935, US State Department Records on Iraq, Internal Affairs, Series 890G.00/331.

⁹⁴ MacDonald, 44; Tripp, 83.

⁹⁵ Nakash, 125.

⁹⁶ Following the rebellion, Bakr Sidqi pressed the government to execute those *shaykhs* responsible for its instigation. The Cabinet refused. Sir Archibald Clark Kerr to Sir Samuel Hoare, 11 June 1935 in de L. Rush, ed., *Records of Iraq*, Vol. 7, 435.

Staff. Unsurprisingly, this position was reserved for Taha al-Hashimi—Yasin al-Hashimi's brother, who possessed far less battlefield experience than Bakr yet had nevertheless held the job for seven years. The prime minister's apparent lack of gratitude toward Bakr Sidqi for suppressing a revolt that he had been largely responsible for instigating left the Iraqi general and his loyal following within the military increasingly embittered.

Apart from the burgeoning personality cult developing around Bakr Sidqi, the officer class as a whole felt emboldened by its successful policing of internal disorder. Even the normally critical reports of British observers praised the discipline and tactical efficiency of the Iraqi army. In particular, the newly-formed air force had performed exceptionally well in supporting Iraqi ground troops.⁹⁷ Such an achievement no doubt fostered a new sense of nationalist pride within the military's ranks, a realization that the country's previous dependence upon the RAF had been finally ended.⁹⁸ As Kenneth Williams observed at the end of 1935:

Military successes over Shi'i tribesmen in the Middle Euphrates, over the Yazidis in the north, and the like, have given the army an assurance *the bounds of which are not perceptible.*⁹⁹ (italics added)

A generation gap within the military also offers a persuasive explanation for the later intrusion of the military into Iraqi politics—many younger officers were educated in British schools and felt frustrated with the outmoded leadership of the aging Ottoman-

⁹⁷ Sir Archibald Clark Kerr to Mr. Eden, Annual Report for 1936 (Confidential), 30 January 1937 in Jarman, ed., *Political Diaries*, Vol. 6, 300.

⁹⁸ According to Captain A.D. MacDonald: "In these operations, which are the first that have been independently undertaken by the army against the tribes of southern Iraq, the army has comported itself creditably (sic) and done much to dispel a generally felt lack of confidence in its ability to hold together and act effectively in the face of serious tribal opposition." MacDonald, 44.

⁹⁹ Kenneth Williams, Great Britain and the East, London, 5 November 1936, 643. Quoted in Eliezer Be'eri, *Army Officers in Arab Politics and Society* (New York: Praeger, 1970), 19.

trained generals tied to the Hashimi government.¹⁰⁰ Moreover, there is strong evidence of bitterness among the officer class toward Britain--and thus, indirectly, Hashimi's regime--for delaying much-needed arms shipments that were seen as absolutely essential in establishing the military's authority after the 1935 revolts.¹⁰¹ Finally, the prime minister's accumulation of land and private wealth, in addition to his notoriously corrupt style of rule, provoked significant contempt within the military's ranks.¹⁰² The army's frustration, by mid-1936, was thus a powerful reservoir of discontent—a political force ready and able to assist any would-be challenger to the Hashimi government.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, it was Hikmat Sulayman who would seek to co-opt the military in a bid to overthrow the Hashimi government. Despite his major role in planning and instigating the Shi'i revolts of 1935, his efforts were not rewarded by Yasin al-Hashimi. Hoping to receive the position of minister of interior in Hashimi's cabinet, Sulayman was outraged and embittered when this post went to Rashid 'Ali. By the summer of 1936, Hikmat Sulayman had resigned from the *Ikha* party and joined the ranks of *al-Jama'at al-Ahali*—an eclectic, yet weak, grouping of intellectuals, reformists, and liberal democrats who shared the military's dislike of the Hashimi regime.¹⁰³ It seems only natural, therefore, that Hikmat Sulayman, in collusion with the *Jama'at al-Ahali*, would conspire with his longtime ally, Bakr Sidqi to topple the Hashimi government in October 1936. Sulayman's solicitation of the military as a strategy for personal power is perhaps best summarized in the comments of the American ambassador in Baghdad:

Hikmat Sulayman was well versed in revolutionary intrigue and was therefore well-qualified to organize the military coup d'etat to overthrow Yasin. Instead of

¹⁰⁰ Marr, 355.

¹⁰¹ Tarbush, 126-7.

¹⁰² Al-Hasani, "Thawrat Bakr Sidqi," *Ta'rikh al-Wizarat*, Vol. 7, 192-194.

¹⁰³ Tarbush, 129.

turning to the tribes, as did the former “outs,” to bring about a revolution, he used the more effective means of winning over the army.¹⁰⁴

Conclusion

Aside from the 1920 revolt, the uprisings of 1935 and 1936 were the most significant instance of armed dissent by the Shi‘is until the *intifada* of 1991. Fuelled by a broad array of motives—economic, political, religious, and personal—the revolt yielded little benefits for any significant section of Shi‘i society. The major landowning *shaykhs* were co-opted into the al-Hashimi government, yet the *mujtahids*, the lesser *shaykhs*, and the urban lay activists were effectively barred from any channels of political representation. After 1937, the major Shi‘i tribes were systematically disarmed and conscripted into the army. Rural insurrection by the Shi‘is as a strategy for resisting Baghdad’s will was thus removed as a viable option—a development that gave successive regimes a free hand in confronting the Kurdish revolts of Mulla Mustafa Barzani in the mountainous north. Ultimately, the revolt must be viewed as a cynical ploy by the ex-Sharifian *al-Ikha* that paved the way for a period of authoritarian rule under Yasin al-Hashimi, followed by the entry of military officers into Iraqi politics.

With the flight of the Iraqi air force over Baghdad on the morning of 29 October 1936 and the dispersal of leaflets announcing the imminent entry of Bakr Sidqi’s troops into the capital, Iraq had entered a new era.¹⁰⁵ The relatively peaceful overthrow of Yasin al-Hashimi and the assumption of power by Hikmat Sulayman and Bakr Sidiq inaugurated a long period of military interference in Iraqi politics, whose legacy on the country’s political development was far-reaching and detrimental. Drawing upon his

¹⁰⁴ Knabenshue to Secretary of State, “Military Coup d’Etat in Iraq and Subsequent Developments Pointing to Another Revolt Having Serious Consequences,” 24 December 1936, US State Department Records on Iraq, Internal Affairs, Series 890G.00/395.

¹⁰⁵ *The Iraq Times*, 30 October 1936.

suppression of the Shi‘i insurgency, Bakr Sidqi and the Iraqi army portrayed themselves as the nation’s salvation—not only from the specter of communal dissent, but from politicians who sought to consciously manipulate that dissent for their own personal ambition.

In the post-Hashimi era, the military saw itself as the final arbiter of intra-elite disputes, with the expectation of bringing a measure of stability to the troubled state. Ironically, the networks of patronage and rivalry persisted, and the co-option of army officers in the name of the “nation” became another ploy in the dangerous game of elite politics—just as the instigation of disgruntled tribal *shaykhs* in the name of the Shi‘is had been in early 1935. It is therefore not surprising that Bakr Sidqi and Hikmat Sulayman, having risen to power through their suppression of Assyrian and Shi‘i dissent, would come under fire for their alleged pro-Kurdish sympathies by a rival pan-Arab bloc in the officer corps, led informally by Salah al-Din al-Sabbagh. Known as the Golden Square, this faction assassinated Bakr in 1937, exiled his allies, and later aligned itself with Rashid ‘Ali to topple the monarchy in 1941. In subsequent histories and memoirs of the period, Bakr has been lambasted for increasing the number of Kurdish officers in military and, according to one source, working toward the establishment of an independent Kurdish state in the north.¹⁰⁶ While such charges are doubtful at best, it is true that Bakr

¹⁰⁶ In his memoirs, Taha al-Hashimi attacked Bakr for encouraging sectarian unrest and “Kurdish ideas,” while Salah al-Din al-Sabbagh accused him of working as a British intelligence agent in Mosul in 1919—a charge substantiated by British correspondence. See Taha al-Hashimi, *Mudhakkirat Taha al-Hashimi*, Vol. 1, 153; Salah al-Din al-Sabbagh, *Fursan al-‘Uruba fi al-‘Iraq* (Damascus: al-Shabab al-‘Arabi, 1956), 17. According to British sources: “Incidentally, the intelligence branch at the Air Ministry told us the other day that they had discovered that Bakr Sidqi was employed for some time round about 1919-1920 as an intelligence agent of the British military forces in the sort of non-man’s land which then existed between Iraq and Turkey.” G.W. Rendel to Sir Archibald Clark Kerr (Secret), 31 December 1936, reproduced in al-Khattab, *Ta’sis al-Jaysh*, 486. The German ambassador to Iraq, Fritz Grobba, sympathetic to the pro-Axis leanings of the Golden Square, claimed that Bakr had requested German arms and advisors to set up a Kurdish state in the north. Mufti, *Al-‘Iraq bayn al-Ahdayn*, 132.

and Hikmat downplayed Iraq's Arab identity and its involvement in Palestine conflict, seeking instead to improve Iraq's relations with Turkey and Iran.¹⁰⁷ In this sense, their pursuit of an "Iraq First" policy exposed them to charges of *ta'ifiyya* and *shu'ubiyya* by the pan-Arab bloc—a dilemma that would later contribute to the downfall of 'Abd al-Karim al-Qasim in 1963. In Iraq's post-revolutionary era, when devotion to the inter-Arab arena became the yardstick for measuring a politician's nationalist legitimacy, political survival often necessitated a hard line stance on questions of ethnic representation—much as the anti-imperialist credentials of politicians during the mandate were tied to their posture on Kurdish, Shi'i, or Assyrian issues.

¹⁰⁷ Charges of animosity to Arabism were compounded by Bakr's Kurdish ancestry and Hikmat's Turkish background, as well as their reputation as Turkophiles.

CONCLUSION

Our examination of communal mobilization among Iraq's Kurds, Assyrians, and Shi'is has attempted to locate the pivot of Iraqi state formation not in Baghdad, but in the rural provinces of the north and south. By challenging the political vision of the Hashimite monarchy and the nationalist ex-Sharifians, dissident communities on the fringe affected a decisive shift in the trajectory of the state. The very acts of rebellion themselves were ultimately unsuccessful in winning any substantial gains for the disaffected groups that undertook them, yet they provided an important pretext for the emergence of the officer corps as the most powerful Iraqi institution. Such a development would precipitate the downfall of the monarchy; first in 1941, by a group of pan-Arab officers led by Rashid 'Ali, and, more permanently, by the Free Officers in 1958. Most importantly, the strategies of counter-insurgency in the early years of the monarchy foreshadowed an enduring style of authoritarian politics, rooted in discipline and coercion that persists in the present regime.

The suppression of dissent on the periphery by the ex-Sharifian nationalists from 1919 to 1936, often undertaken with stark brutality, nearly always had other objectives than the mere subjugation of the belligerents. In the case of the Kurds and the Assyrians, counter-insurgency became an instrument for Iraqi nationalists to eliminate the possibility of a continued British military presence in the country by proving the capabilities of an indigenous Iraqi army. Moreover, the struggle for the valuable Mosul province became, in essence, a struggle for its disaffected minorities. Accordingly, the specter of Turkish and British subsidies to the Kurds and Assyrians provided a powerful incentive against brokering any concessions to these communities. Such a policy, the nationalists argued,

would lead to the territorial fragmentation of the state and invite continued foreign meddling in its affairs.

With the eruption of the Shi‘i revolts of 1935-6, tribal and sectarian dissent became a powerful political weapon in the hands of opposition figures, led by Yasin al-Hashimi, who actively incited rebellions in the south as a strategy to topple the government. The subsequent suppression of these revolts, ironically, enabled a rival faction in the officer corps to oust al-Hashimi and emerge as the dominant force in Iraqi politics. Actions undertaken against an outbreak of provincial violence thus served a useful purpose in intra-elite disputes, enabling key figures to lambaste their political opponents as proponents of *ta’ifiyya* and lackeys of the British. Most significantly, however, rural insurgency offered a convenient diversion for embattled regimes—a means to close ranks with their opponents in the name of “national unity.”

* * * * *

On a clear day in late August 1996, over 40,000 soldiers and three tank divisions from Saddam Husayn’s elite Republican Guard rolled into the Kurdish enclave of northern Iraq, quickly re-asserting government control over the regional capital of Irbil. Well-planned and deftly executed, the lightening assault was launched as part of a tactical alliance between Baghdad and one of the major Kurdish factions, the Kurdistan Democratic Party, under the leadership of Masoud Barzani. Frustrated at signs that his rival, Jalal Talabani of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan, had bolstered his position through Iranian assistance, Barzani struck a devil’s bargain with Saddam.¹

¹ Kanan Makiya, “The Politics of Betrayal,” *The New York Review of Books* 43:16 (17 September 1996), 8-12. Iraqi forces subsequently pulled back from Irbil, after dismantling the opposition’s network and conducting mass executions. Jonathan C. Randal, “Iraqi Opposition Describes Mass Executions Near Irbil,” *The Washington Post*, 2 September 1996.

The Iraqi ruler adroitly seized upon Barzani's invitation as a way to silence a growing trend of discontent within the Republican Guard and burnish his image during a period of severe internal crises. Following the execution of General Husayn Kamil and his two brothers, in reprisal for their defection to Jordan, Saddam was confronted with ominous signs of disaffection within the state bureaucracy and military, particularly among those officials drawn from Kamil's powerful al-bu Nasir tribe. Moreover, the regime was shaken by a major coup attempt the previous summer, in which several mid-ranking officers within the air force and the Republican Guard had been implicated. By reclaiming Iraqi sovereignty over portions of the Kurdish north, the Irbil operation served as a clever diversionary ploy for Saddam; a way to close ranks with the al-bu Nasir tribe and provide a new boost to the military's battered morale. Mobilizing the Guard for an operation against the north, Saddam calculated, might force any potential coup plotters to abandon their plans.² The parallels between such a move and the political strategies pursued by the ex-Sharifians are striking.

Since the eruption of nearly simultaneous revolts in the north and south following the 1991 Gulf War, Iraq has once again entered an era of insurgency and communal dissent. The country's Kurdish and Shi'i populations, riddled with factional rivalries, have confronted the policies of a vengeful and autocratic regime through various strategies: the solicitation of foreign patronage, armed rebellion, collaboration, and exile. Faced with such disaffection and the erosion of the Ba'th party infrastructure, Saddam's

² Chris Hedges, "Baghdad's Move Puts the Future of Kurdish Safe Haven in Doubt," *The New York Times*, 1 September 1996; Jonathan C. Randal, "Kurdish Feuds and Surrogate Powers," *The Washington Post*, 1 September 1996. The convincing interpretation of the Irbil operation as a diversionary ploy has been advanced by Amatzia Baram, "Saddam Husayn Conquers Irbil: Causes and Implications," *Policy Watch* 214, 4 September 1996, The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org>; accessed 9 April 2002.

internal circle has attempted to strike a balance between coercion and co-option; between military suppression and political seduction. With the weakening of the center through sanctions and war, the regime has devolved a measure of authority to the countryside, skillfully co-opting the major tribal *shaykhs* as allies who raise their own militias, collect taxes, and implement their own standards of justice.³ Yet as evidenced by the ruthless decimation of the southern marshes, the execution of dissident Shi'i clerics, the reconquest of portions of the north, and the forced deportations of Kurds outside the northern "safe haven," the regime retains the ability to project its will into the periphery.⁴ As a strategy for social control, the political theater of counter-insurgency--selected acts of repression for psychological and political effect--has thus assumed a new prominence in the post-Gulf War era.

Is Iraq condemned to endure conditions of internal unrest and communal violence? Is an iron-fisted regime, buttressed by military rule, the only viable future for the troubled state? Recent history is hardly grounds for optimism. What remains clear, as demonstrated in this study, is the utter bankruptcy of counter-insurgency as an organizing principle for political authority and long-term stability. It is to be hoped that a new style of politics will emerge in the post-Saddam era—a form of government rooted

³ Faleh A. Jaber, "Shaykhs and Ideologues: Detribalization and Retribalization in Iraq, 1968-1998," *Middle East Report* 215 (Summer 2000), 28-48; "Iraq: Saddam's 'New Deal' to Revive Tribal System," *Al-Sharq al-Awsat* (London), 15 May 1996, FBIS-NES-96-096, 15 May 1996; Amatzia Baram, "Neo-Tribalism in Iraq: Saddam Hussein's Tribal Policies, 1991-1996," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 29 (1997), 1-31.

⁴ For uprisings in the south and the government's response, Chris Hedges, "In a Remote Southern Marsh, Iraq is Strangling the Shiites," *The New York Times*, 12 November 1993; "Opposition Says Demonstrations Erupt in Southern Iraq," *Agence France Presse* (Paris), 20 February 1999, FBIS-NES-1999-0220, 20 February 1999; "Iraq Unrest 'Violently Suppressed' by Saddam Regime," *Agence France Presse* (Paris), 23 February 1999, FBIS-NES-1999-023, 23 February 1999; "London-Based Paper on Clashes in Iraqi Cities," *Al-Sharq al-Awsat* (London), 21 February 1999, FBIS-NES-1999-0221, 21 February 1999. Douglas Jehl, "From Southern Iraq, Hints of a New Wave of Sectarian Unrest," *The New York Times*, 3 October 1999.

in integration, rather than subjugation, that can guarantee for the country's ethnic and sectarian groups a measure of representation and cultural freedom.

DISCLAIMER

**The views expressed in this thesis are those of the author and do not reflect
the official policy or position of the United States Air Force, Department of Defense,
or the US Government**

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Council of the League of Nations. *Official Journal*. October 1924, October 1933, December 1933. Microfilm.

Jarman, Robert, ed. *Iraq Administration Reports*. 9 vols. Oxford: Archive Editions, 1998.

A collection of reports by the British mandatory authorities to the League of Nations. For research on the Kurdish issue, these documents should be handled with great care; they represent the version of Iraqi politics that Britain wanted to portray to the international community. To absolve itself of its responsibilities in Iraq, Britain had to demonstrate the good behavior of the Iraqi government toward its minorities. On the Assyrian community, however, there is less discrepancy between these reports and Britain's secret internal memoranda.

_____. *Political Diaries of the Arab World: Iraq*. 8 vols. Oxford: Archive Editions, 1992.

League of Nations. *Question of the Frontier Between Turkey and Iraq*. Lausanne, Imprimeries Reunies, 1924.

Royal Government of Iraq. *Correspondence Relating to the Assyrian Settlement*. Baghdad: Government Printing Press, 1933. Microfilm.

An invaluable resource for gleaning Baghdad's position on the Assyrian affair; serves as a useful counterweight to British and Assyrian accounts.

Rush, Alan de L., ed. *The Records of Iraq, 1914-1966*. 15 vols. Oxford: Archive Editions, 2001.

In lieu of research at the Public Record Office, these volumes were an invaluable resource. British memoranda, intelligence reports, newspaper clippings, and official speeches are organized according to topic, in chronological order. Obviously, the material represents only what the editor has selected--a fraction of what is actually available for the mandate period. Still, the sources on communal dissent and Baghdad's reaction were evenly distributed and very pertinent to this study.

United Kingdom. Colonial Office. *Report on the Administration of Iraq, October 1920-March 1922*. London: HMSO, 1922. Microfilm

United Kingdom. Colonial Office. *Report on the Administration of Iraq, April 1922-March 1923*. London: HMSO, 1924. Microfilm.

United Kingdom. Colonial Office. *Report by His Britannic Majesty's Government to the Council of the League of Nations on the Administration of Iraq for the Period April 1923-December 1924*. London: HMSO, 1925. Microfilm.

United Kingdom. Colonial Office. *Special Report by His Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the Council of the League of Nations on the Progress of Iraq during the period 1920-1931*. London: HMSO, 1931. Microfilm.

United Kingdom. Parliament. House of Commons. *Parliamentary Debates*. London, HMSO, 1931.

US State Department, *Records on Iraq, Internal Affairs, 1930-1944*, Series 890G. Microfilm.

American embassy sources were remarkably honest about reporting the tension and mutual suspicion between Iraqi officials and British administrators, particularly on the issue of how best to address the eruption of sectarian and ethnic dissent. These documents were therefore important for all three chapters.

Works in Arabic

Abu Tabikh, Muhsin. *Mudhakkirat: Khamsun 'Aman min Ta'rikh al-'Iraq al-Siyasi al-Hadith*. Beirut: al-Mu'sassat al-'Arabiyya lil-Dirassat wa al-Nashr, 2001.

An edited memoir by a prominent figure in Shi'i tribal politics, this work was most helpful for its first-hand discussion of the conspiracy between Yasin al-Hashimi and the Euphrates *shaykhs*. In particular, the memoir shows how Shi'i tribal leaders, acting out of narrow economic and personal motives, portrayed their revolt as a broad nationalist uprising against political tyranny.

al-Hasani, 'Abd al-Razzaq. *Ta'rikh al-'Iraq al-Siyasi al-Hadith*. Sidon: Matba'at al-Irfan, 1946.

_____. *Tarikh al-Wizarat al-'Iraqiyya*. Sidon: Matba'at al-Irfan, 1953-1967.

A valuable reservoir of primary source material, al-Hasani's chronicle of Iraqi politics is weak on synthesis and analysis. Still, the author has included copies of confidential government memoranda, newspaper extracts, royal decrees, and minutes of parliamentary debates. This thesis relied heavily upon his detailed accounts of how the Baghdad elite perceived the successive revolts of Shaykh Mahmud, the Assyrian affair,

and the Shi‘i uprisings. At times, al-Hasani adopts a nationalist, Arabist, position on questions relating to sectarian rights; it was helpful, therefore, to compare his version of events with that of British and American observers.

_____. *Al-Thawra al-‘Iraqiyya al-Kubra*. Sidon: Matba‘at al-Irfan, 1952.

al-Hashimi, Taha. *Mudhakkirat Taha al-Hashimi*, Vols. 1-2. Beirut: Dar al-Tali‘a, 1978.

Unfortunately, the diaries of Taha al-Hashimi devote little attention to the mandate period or the author’s important role as the Chief of Staff and Yasin al-Hashimi’s brother. We do not hear, for example, how General Taha viewed the successive provincial revolts that buffeted the monarchy. Despite these omissions, the diaries contain an interesting discussion of the Kurdish threat as an impetus for Iraq’s union attempts with Syria and a critical account of the Sidqi/Sulayman regime.

al-Husri, Sati‘. *Mudhakkirati fi al-‘Iraq*. Vols. 1-2. Beirut: Dar al-Tali‘a, 1966-1968.

In his memoirs, Al-Husri is quite candid about his opposition to the use of Kurdish textbooks and the establishment of provincial schools. This work was thus a valuable source for gauging Baghdad’s position on Kurdish demands for cultural autonomy, as well as understanding the importance of state-imposed Arabism as a pillar of nation-building. Moreover, the memoir contains several accounts of al-Husri’s confrontation with Shi‘i education officials.

al-Khattab, Raja‘ Husayn. *Ta’sis al-Jaysh al-‘Iraqi wa Tatawwur Dawrihi al-Siyasi min 1921-1941*. Baghadad: Jami‘at Baghadad, 1979.

Unabashedly pan-Arabist and nationalist; the author clearly intended to portray the constructive and positive role of the military in challenging British hegemony and shaping the Arab nation. In particular, the study devotes considerable attention to lambasting Bakr Sidqi as a British agent and a proponent of *shu‘ubiya*; this perspective was surprisingly helpful in forming the argument of Chapter Three.

al-Mufti, Hazim. *Al-‘Iraq bayn al-Ahdayn: Yasin al-Hashimi wa Bakr Sidqi*. Baghadad: Maktabat al-Yuqaza al-Arabiyya, 1990.

This study also adopts a somewhat uncritical, nationalist stance on early Iraqi history. Al-Mufti’s argument that Bakr Sidqi intended to set up a Kurdish state in the north is an interesting example of how the views of the pan-Arab officer bloc have been woven into Iraqi historiography. Despite his biases, the author’s presentation of the Shi‘i tribal revolts and Yasin al-Hashimi’s ascension to power is remarkably detailed and coherent.

Nasiri, ‘Uqayl. *Al-Jaysh wa al-Sulta fi al-‘Iraq al-Malaki, 1921-1928*. Damascus: Dar al-Hasad, 2000.

al-Qassab, 'Abd al-'Aziz. *Min Dhikriyati*. Beirut: Manshurat 'Uwaydat, 1962.

Very helpful in conveying the threatening character of sectarian dissent from the perspective of a provincial governor in the northern province.

al-Sabbagh, Salah al-Din. *Fursan al-'Uruba fi al-'Iraq*. Damascus: al-Shabab al-'Arabi, 1956.

Another memoir by a key figure in the Golden Square; valuable for its scathing attacks on the "Iraq Firsters" led by Hikmat Sulayman and Bakr Sidqi.

Secondary Sources in English

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Barth, Fredrik, ed. *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Culture Difference*. London: Allen and Unwin, 1969.

Provided a helpful framework for understanding the overlapping and varied loyalties implicitly contained in such terms as "sectarian" or "ethnic."

Batatu, Hanna. *The Old Social Classes and the Revolutionary Movements of Iraq: A Study of Iraq's Old Landed and Commercial Classes and of its Communists, Ba'thists, and Free Officers*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1978.

A monumental and encyclopedic work that attaches primacy to class analysis; little attention is paid to the role of the British or the importance of sectarian grievances as a focal point for anti-regime agitation. Nevertheless, the chapters on the geographic, social, and economic diversity of the mandatory state and the role of the ex-Sharifian officers were invaluable for this study.

Be'eri, Eliezer. *Army Officers in Arab Politics and Society*. New York: Praeger Press, 1970.

Bell, Lady Gertrude, ed. *Letters of Gertrude Bell*, Vol. 2. London: E. Benn, 1927.

Bell's letters, though not without their dangers as a primary source, were useful in conveying the viewpoint of the ex-Sharifians on questions of state-formation and developments on the periphery.

Bengio, Ofra. *Saddam's Word: Political Discourse in Iraq*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998.

Helpful for exploring how the current regime has developed a vocabulary of dissent to marginalize its opponents. Despite its exhaustive analysis of regime

propaganda and presidential speeches, the author could have devoted more attention to the historical antecedents of such terms as *ta’ifiyya* and *shu’ubiyya* in the monarchic period.

Browne, Brigadier-General J. Gilbert. *The Iraq Levies, 1915-1932*. London: Royal United Service Institution, 1932.

A disappointing account of an important imperial institution in mandate Iraq. The author focuses almost solely on a descriptive narrative of the Assyrians' military campaigns, with little attention paid to broader questions of politics.

Cleveland, William. *The Making of an Arab Nationalist: Ottomanism and Arabism in the Life and Thought of Sati' al-Husri*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1971.

Coakley, J.F. *The Church of the East and the Church of England: A History of the Archbishop of Canterbury's Assyrian Mission*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992.

A useful supplement to John Joseph's more authoritative study on the Assyrians.

Edmonds, C.J. *Kurds, Turks and Arabs: Politics, Travel and Research in North-Eastern Iraq, 1919-1925*. London: Oxford University Press, 1957.

Probably the best single memoir by a British political officer in mandate Iraq. Edmonds was an excellent linguist with a trenchant understanding of Iraqi society, particularly in the north. His memoir was most valuable in highlighting the role of the British in cultivating Kurdish nationalism as a counterweight to Kemalist encroachment. Interestingly, the author was one of the few voices that foresaw the disastrous and threatening implications of this policy for the stability of the Iraqi state.

Eppel, Michael. *The Palestine Conflict in the History of Modern Iraq: The Dynamics of Involvement, 1928-1948*. London: Frank Cass, 1994.

Eppel offers a good discussion of pan-Arabism in the Iraqi officer corps; the book's main focus, however, lies slightly outside the scope of this thesis.

Esman, Milton J. and Itamar Rabinovich, eds. *Ethnicity, Pluralism, and the State in the Middle East*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1988.

The introduction to this collection of essays presents a solid overview of historical theories on ethnic identity, as well as the strategies pursued by communal groups in a Middle Eastern context. Helpful for charting the course of historical writing on the subject of Middle Eastern ethnicity, particularly the influence of modernization theory.

Fernea, Robert A. and Wm. Roger Louis, eds. *The Iraqi Revolution of 1958: The Old Social Classes Revisited*. London: I.B. Tauris, 1991.

Sami Zubaida's essay on communal groups and politics in Iraq is a first-rate, remarkably prescient commentary on the salience of sectarian and ethnic loyalties in the modern Iraqi state. Serves as a useful counterweight to those studies which argued, somewhat optimistically, that modernization and the rise of the middle class would subsume "old loyalties." Zubaida convincingly probes the role of authoritarian rule in preserving sect and tribe as foci for political identity.

Fuccaro, Nelida. *The Other Kurds: Yazidis in Colonial Iraq*. London: I.B. Tauris, 1999.

Well-written analysis of communal mobilization in the context of British colonial rule. Her examination of the impact of European missionaries and the League of Nations on minority self-perception is absolutely fascinating and worthy of further study.

Giddens, Anthony. *The Nation-State and Violence*. Berkeley: The University of California Press, 1985.

Theoretical examination of nation-building that emphasizes the importance of internal pacification, the state's administrative reach, and the government's monopoly on violence. Provides a useful framework for analyzing the ex-Sharifians' conception of the Iraqi state and the primacy of counter-insurgency as a method of social control.

Hay, W.R. *Two Years in Kurdistan: Experiences of a Political Officer, 1918-1920*. London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1921.

Hopwood, Derek, Habib Ishow, and Thomas Koszinowksi, eds. *Iraq: Power and Society*. Reading: Ithaca Press, 1993.

Hourani, Albert. *Minorities in the Arab World*. London: Oxford University Press, 1947.

A classic in the field; this book was valuable for its discussion of the Assyrians as a "compact minority."

Izady, Mehrdad. *The Kurds: A Concise Handbook*. London: Taylor and Francis, 1992.

Encyclopedic work covering Kurdish history, customs, politics, dialects, religion, and much more. Most useful for this thesis were the sections on the different Sufi orders in Iraqi Kurdistan, as well as the linguistic and tribal divisions that permeate Kurdish society.

Jankowski, James and Israel Gershoni, eds. *Rethinking Nationalism in the Arab Middle East*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1997.

Reeva Simon's chapter on Iraqi nationalism during the inter-war years is an admirable exploration of how state-imposed Arabism affected two significant groups in Iraq—Jews and Shi'is. She devotes special attention to the role of conscription and education as vehicles for the transmission of this ideology.

Joseph, John. *The Nestorians and their Muslim Neighbors: A Study of Western Influence on their Relations*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1961.

The definitive study of the Nestorian or Assyrian Christians in the modern period; devotes considerable effort to challenging nationalist and partisan accounts of the Assyrian experience. For this thesis, Joseph's examination of the effects of Western romanticism and orientalism, missionary activity, and archaeology on Assyrian identity in Iraq was illuminating.

Kedourie, Elie. *The Chatham House Version and other Middle-Eastern Studies*. London: University Press of New England, 1984.

The author's caustic and incisive essay on monarchic Iraq highlights the prominence of armed dissent, violence, and government repression as features of the state's political landscape. In particular, Kedourie's critique of Husri's Arabist ideology--although not without a certain degree of hyperbole--calls attention to the dangerous implications of such an exclusivist vision for the country's non-Arab minorities. The essay's underlying conclusion, however--that Britain abdicated its imperial responsibility and that the country is somehow pre-destined for autocratic rule--is most disconcerting.

Kelidar, Abbas, ed. *The Integration of Modern Iraq*. London: Croom Helm, 1979.

P.J. Hemphill's essay on the formation of the Iraqi army is a well-documented study of the military's role in buttressing the rule of the Sunni elite. Despite its merits, however, the study fails to fully address the complex relationship between the army's preservation of internal security, the mobilization of communal dissent, and British imperial control.

Khadduri, Majid. *Independent Iraq 1932-1958: A Study in Iraqi Politics*. London: Oxford University Press, 1960.

Most useful for the author's interviews with Hikmat Sulayman regarding the Assyrian Affair, the 1935 revolt, and the Bakr Sidqi Coup. As a study of intra-elite politics, Khadduri's book succeeds admirably. Kurdish and Shi'i voices, however, are noticeably absent; little attempt is made to relate developments in Baghdad with dissent on the periphery.

Khalidi, Rashid, Lisa Anderson, et al., eds. *The Origins of Arab Nationalism*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1991.

A fine collection of essays. In particular, Reeva Simon's examination of how Ottoman military education shaped the worldview of the ex-Sharifian officer class in Iraq was very pertinent to this study. Following the Prussian model of state-formation, Ottoman military education emphasized an etatist, centralizing path of nation-building that accorded prominence to the military as an engine of social transformation.

Khoury, Philip S. and Joseph Kostiner, eds. *Tribes and State Formation in the Middle East*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990.

Bassam Tibi's article on tribes and "imposed nation-states" offers a valuable framework for understanding the conflict between Baghdad and dissident communities in the north and south as a struggle between rural and urban elites, rather than a purely religious or ethnic clash.

Killingray, David and David Omissi, eds. *Guardians of Empire: The Armed Forces of the Colonial Powers c. 1700-1964*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999.

This study never addresses the Middle East directly, but was nonetheless helpful in showing how minorities who collaborate with imperial powers are viewed by the rest of the populace in African and Asian post-colonial states. The editors' discussion of how the colonial theory of "the martial races" affected inter-ethnic relations and state-formation is especially relevant to the chapter on the Assyrians.

Kinnane, Derk. *The Kurds and Kurdistan*. London: Oxford University Press, 1964.

Klieman, Aaron. *Foundations of British Policy in the Arab World: The Cairo Conference of 1921*. Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1970.

A key source for examining the varied, and often conflicting views of British strategists on the Mosul province.

Levone, Mark and Penny Roberts, eds. *The Massacre in History*. New York: Berghahn Books, 1999.

This study argues that a government-sponsored massacre is ultimately a form of political theater—intended primarily as a statement of regime power in the face of external or internal opposition. Moreover, the volume attaches special significance to how memories of a massacre preserve a sense of solidarity and group identity among diaspora communities. Such a framework was valuable in the analysis presented in Chapter Two.

Longrigg, Stephen H. *Iraq 1900-1950: A Political, Social, and Economic History*. London: Oxford University Press, 1953.

A solid, if somewhat dated account of monarchic Iraq. Most helpful as background for the structure and goals of British rule.

Lukitz, Liora. *Iraq: The Search for National Identity*. London: Frank Cass, 1995.

Lyon, Wallace. *Kurds, Arabs, and Britons: The Memoir of Wallace Lyon in Iraq, 1918-1944*, ed. D.K. Fieldhouse. London: I.B. Tauris, 2001.

The value of this memoir lies in its author's long tenure as a political officer in northern Iraq. Although lacking Edmonds' academic training, Lyon was nevertheless well-positioned to observe key events in the struggle between Baghdad and the Kurds, as well as shifts in British policy.

Makiya, Kanan. *Cruelty and Silence: War, Tyranny, Uprising and the Arab World*. New York: W.W. Norton, 1993.

_____. *Republic of Fear: The Politics of Modern Iraq*. Berkeley, University of California Press, 1998.

Malik, Yusuf. *The Assyrian Tragedy*. Annemasse: Granchamp, 1934.

The British Betrayal of the Assyrians. Warren Point, NJ: Kimball Press, 1935.

Highly partisan accounts of the Assyrian experience in Iraq; most useful for their translations of the Mar Shimun's petitions to the League.

Marr, Phebe. *A Modern History of Iraq*. Boulder, CO: Westview, 1985.

An authoritative work that has yet to be surpassed. In particular, her discussion of the different strands of nationalist opposition to Faysal during the mandate aided the analysis presented in all three chapters of this thesis.

MacDonald, A.D. *Euphrates Exile*. London: Bell, 1946.

McDowell, David. *A Modern History of the Kurds*. London: I.B. Tauris, 1996.

The McDowell's chapter on Britain, Iraq, and the Kurds explores the motives and strategies pursued by Shaykh Mahmud in northern Iraq, as well as the impact of key British political officers in formulating the policy of tribal control. Still, his study focuses almost exclusively on the relationship between the British and the Kurds, with little attention devoted to how Baghdad elites perceived Kurdish dissent.

Nakash, Yitzhak. *The Shi'is of Iraq*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994.

The most comprehensive study of Iraq's Shi'is; immeasurably helpful in analyzing the tribal revolts of 1935-36, as well as the fissures between rural and urban Shi'i society.

Omissi, David. *Air Power and Colonial Control: The Royal Air Force, 1919-1939*. New York: Manchester University Press, 1990.

A fascinating discussion of airpower's importance in sustaining imperial rule during a period of severe manpower shortages following World War One. In particular, Omissi develops the notion that British authorities neglected more substantial economic and social reforms in northern Iraq, believing instead that communal dissent among the Kurds could be subdued through bombing alone. Unfortunately, the author does not extend this line of thinking to examine how Iraq's dependence on the RAF influenced elite politics in Iraq, Baghdad's relations with provincial communities, and the development of Iraqi nationalism.

al-Rasheed, Madawi. *Iraqi Assyrian Christians in London: The Construction of Ethnicity*. Lewiston, UK: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2000.

Rassam, Hormuzd. *Asshur and the Land of Nimrod*. Cincinnati: Curts and Jennings, 1897.

Rich, Paul B. and Richard Stubbs, eds. *The Counter-Insurgent State: Guerrilla Warfare and State-Building in the Twentieth Century*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997.

The editor's introductory essay probes the relationship between internal unrest and the rise of the officer corps as a political institution in post-colonial states during the twentieth century. This is a significant work with clear implications for Iraqi history beyond the mandate period.

Rockwell, W.W. *The Pitiful Plight of the Assyrian Christians in Persia and Kurdistan*. New York: American Committee for Armenian and Syrian Relief, 1916.

Silverfarb, Danial. *Britain's Informal Empire in the Middle East: A Case Study of Iraq 1929-1941*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1986.

Solid analysis of British rule in Iraq organized by themes, such as arms supply, oil, airbases, etc. Silverfarb's discussion of British policy toward the Assyrian Levies was especially helpful for Chapter Two.

Simon, Reeva. *Iraq between the Two World Wars*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1986.

Sluglett, Peter. *Britain in Iraq, 1914-1932*. London: Ithaca Press, 1976.

An admirable, authoritative study of British rule in Iraq. For this thesis, Sluglett's examination of the role of Britain's tribal policy in sustaining areas of jurisdiction exempt from Baghdad's authority was extremely insightful. Moreover, the author's reliance upon Arabic, as well as British sources enabled him to convey the suspicions of the ex-Sharifians about Britain's ulterior motives in Iraq; specifically, the use of minority dissent as a tool to weaken the Arab state.

Smith, Anthony D. *Nationalism and Modernism: A Critical Survey of Recent Theories of Nations and Nationalism*. London: Routledge, 1998.

Stafford, R.S. *The Tragedy of the Assyrians*. London: George Allen & Unwin, 1935.

Among British officials Iraq, Stafford probably had the most intimate knowledge of Assyrian politics and society. His account, unfortunately, serves as a sort of *mea culpa*, placing much of the blame for Assyrians' predicament on Britain's shoulders. Nevertheless, the work provides a useful examination of intra-elite politics within Assyrian society; specifically, how the Mar Shimun sought to enhance his own position by appealing to the principles of self-determination.

Susser, Asher and Aryeh Shmuelovitz. *The Hashemites in the Modern Arab World*. London: Frank Cass, 1995.

Tarbush, Mohammed A. *The Role of the Military in Politics: A Case Study of Iraq to 1941*. London: Kegan Paul, 1982.

The single best study of Iraq's military. The author devotes special attention to the issue of conscription as a strategy for nation-building and the role of the Assyrian massacre in bolstering the prestige of Bakr Sidqi and the officer class. A valuable source for all three chapters.

Tauber, Eliezer. *The Formation of Modern Syria and Iraq*. Portland OR: Frank Cass, 1995.

Tripp, Charles. *A History of Iraq*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000.

A solid study; very useful for its bibliography of Arabic and English sources, as well as unpublished doctoral dissertations. Tripp's focus on violence as an instrument for social control by successive regimes was very helpful in understanding the dynamic relationship between Baghdad and the provinces.

Van Bruinessen, Martin. *Agha, Shaykh and State: On the Social and Political Organization of Kurdistan*. Rijswijk: Europrint, 1978.

Wigram, W.A. *The Assyrians and their Neighbours*. London: G. Bell & Sons, 1929.
Our Smallest Ally. London: G. Bell & Sons, 1920.

Another partisan, highly emotional account of the Assyrians in Iraq by a British missionary.

Wilson, A.T. *A Clash of Loyalties: Mesopotamia, 1917-1920*. London: Oxford University Press, 1931.

A detailed memoir by one of Britain's most influential figures in Iraq; for this study, Wilson's book was most helpful in highlighting the application of India Office rule to northern Iraq and its subsequent impact on Iraqi state-formation.

Yohannan, Abraham. *The Death of a Nation, or the Ever-Persecuted Nestorians or Assyrian Christians*. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1916.

Articles

Anon. "Major Soane at Sulaymaniyah." *Journal of the Royal Central Asian Society* 10 (1923): 145-148.

Baram, Amatzia. "Neo-Tribalism in Iraq: Saddam Hussein's Tribal Policies, 1991-1996." *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 29 (1997): 1-31.

Beck, Peter J. "'A Tedious and Perilous Controversy': Britain and the Settlement of the Mosul Dispute, 1918-1926." *Middle Eastern Studies* 17: 2 (1981): 27-44.

Bou-Nackle, N.E. "Les Troupes Spéciales: Religious and Ethnic Recruitment, 1916-1946." *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 25 (1993): 645-660.

Edmonds, C.J. "A Kurdish Newspaper: 'Rozh-i-Kurdistan.'" *Journal of the Royal Central Asian Society* 12 (1925): 83-90.

One of the few English-language studies of the Kurdish press during the mandate period. Instrumental in showing how tribal leaders co-opted Kurdish nationalists in their bid to resist the centralizing power of the state.

Eppel, Michael. "The Elite, the *Effendiyya*, and the Growth of Nationalism and Pan-Arabism in Hashemite Iraq, 1921-1958." *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 30 (1998): 227-250.

Eskander, Saad. "Southern Kurdistan under Britain's Mesopotmian Mandate: From Separation to Incorporation, 1920-1923." *Middle Eastern Studies* 37:2 (2001): 153-180.

One of the best monographs on Britain's strategy for wresting control of the Mosul province away from Kemalists. In particular, Eskander discusses how the British attempted to mobilize Kurdish identity as a counterweight to Kemalist penetration.

Fuccaro, Nelida. "Ethnicity, State Formation, and Conscription in Postcolonial Iraq: The Case of the Yazidi Kurds of Jebel Sinjar." *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 29 (1997): 559-80.

This article analyzes how the expansion of Baghdad's authority into the rural periphery--specifically, the imposition of conscription--affected the political status of an isolated minority. At least partially, Fuccaro's monograph served as model for what this study intended to convey on a larger scale. Her wide-ranging use of primary sources from British and French archives, travelers' accounts, and available Arabic material is especially commendable.

Heller, Mark. "Politics and the Military in Iraq and Jordan, 1920-1958: The British Influence." *Armed Forces and Society* 4:1 (1977): 75-100.

Husry, Khaldun S. "The Assyrian Affair of 1933." *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 5 (1974): 161-76/344-60.

An exhaustive treatment of the attempted mutiny by the Assyrian Levies and Bakr Sidqi's military operation. Although the author clearly argues that the provocation of the armed Assyrians necessitated a firm and unequivocal response, the article is not without its biases. In particular, Husry relies too heavily on the reports of British commanders who were not present with Iraqi troops in the field and often took the post-campaign accounts of their Iraqi colleagues at face value.

Jabar, Faleh A. "Shaykhs and Ideologues: Detribalization and Retribalization in Iraq, 1968-1998." *Middle East Report* 215 (Summer 2000): 28-48.
 _____. "Why the Uprisings Failed." *Middle East Report* 176 (May/June 1992): 2-13.

Jawad, Ferida. "The Triumph of Arabism: The Shu'ubiyyah Controversy and the National Identity of Modern Iraq." *Jusur: The UCLA Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 13 (1997): 53-87.

al-Khafaji, Isam. "State Terror and the Degradation of Politics in Iraq." *Middle East Report* 176 (May/June 1992): 15-21.

Kelidar, 'Abbas. "The Shii Imami Community and Politics in the Arab East." *Middle Eastern Studies* 19 (1983): 3-16.

MacDonald, A.D. "The Political Developments in 'Iraq Leading Up to the Rising in the Spring of 1935," *Journal of the Royal Central Asia Society* 23 (1936): 27-44.

While not completely free from the perceptual biases of British rule, the author's account of the Shi'i revolts pays special attention to how local economic interests and political calculations influenced each *shaykh*'s decision to join the revolt. A British political officer with experience in southern Iraq, MacDonald correctly frames the revolt as a conflict between the urban center and the rural periphery that was given sectarian overtones through the participation and petitions of the *mujtahids*. A key source for Chapter Three.

Macfie, A.L. "British Intelligence and the Causes of Unrest in Mesopotamia, 1919-1921." *Middle Eastern Studies*, 35:1 (1999): 165-177.

For Chapter One, Macfie's article was useful in probing the extent of British fears about a Kemalist-Bolshevik axis determined to seize Mosul. Moreover, the author shows how British intelligence mistakenly attributed local grievances in northern Iraq to a sinister plot by the Turks or Russians.

Makiya, Kanan. "The Politics of Betrayal." *The New York Review of Books* 43:16 (17 September 1996): 8-12.

Marr, Phebe. "The Development of a Nationalist Ideology in Iraq, 1920-1941." *Muslim World* 75 (1985): 85-101.

Another fine work that discusses the impact of Husri's ideas on the ex-Sharifian elite. Valuable for the entire thesis.

Masalha, Nur. "Faisal's Pan-Arabism, 1921-1933." *Middle Eastern Studies* 27:4 (1991): 679-327.

Minorsky, V.F. "The Mosul Question." *International Journal of Kurdish Studies* 7: 1-2 (1994): 22-70.

Useful for examining how minority discontent was frequently manipulated or silenced by outside powers during the diplomatic and military struggle for Mosul.

Omissi, David. "Britain, the Assyrians, and the Iraq Levies, 1919-1932." *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 17 (1989): 310-22.

A tightly-argued analysis of the relationship between the Levies and their British masters. In particular, Omissi discusses how service in the Levies eroded the political position of the entire Assyrian community in mandate Iraq.

Pool, David. "From Elite to Class: The Transformation of Iraqi Leadership, 1920-1939." *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 12 (1980): 331-50.

Sluglett, Peter and Marion Farouk. "The Historiography of Modern Iraq." *American Historical Review* 96 (December 1991): 1408-1421.

A valuable, if somewhat dated, reference work that evaluates most Arabic and English sources on Iraq's modern history. In particular, this bibliographic essay was helpful in identifying those works on the mandate period, such as Longrigg's, which have become outdated following the opening of relevant archives. Moreover, the authors offer an incisive commentary on the steady degradation of Iraqi politics in the hands of successive authoritarian regimes.

Vinogradov, Amal. "The 1920 Revolt in Iraq Reconsidered: The Role of the Tribes in National Politics." *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 3 (1972): 123-39.

Unpublished Doctoral Dissertations

Ali, Othman. *British Policy and the Kurdish Question in Iraq, 1918-1932*. University of Toronto, 1992.

This is probably the best single work on the Iraqi Kurds during the mandate period; it provided a wealth of information on Kurdish society and politics, as well as the effects of British rule. The author benefited immensely from his knowledge of Kurdish and Arabic, as well as his access to British archival sources and little-known Kurdish journals, memoirs, and nationalist publications from the period.

Attar, Kerim A. *The Minorities of Iraq During the Period of the Mandate, 1920-1932*. Columbia University, 1967.

A disappointing work that adopts a pro-regime, apologetic perspective. Unsurprisingly, this dissertation relies heavily on British reports to the League of Nations, which tended to paint an overly optimistic picture of Baghdad's relations with Iraq's minority communities. As this thesis has mentioned, confidential British intelligence sources and internal memoranda--as well as accounts by the communities themselves--suggested an entirely different picture.

Jwaideh, Wadie. *The Kurdish Nationalist Movement: Its Origins and Development*. Syracuse University, 1960.

Marr, Phebe. *Yasin al-Hashimi: The Rise and Fall of a Nationalist*. Harvard University, 1966.

Much more than a political biography, this study is a well-documented, broad-ranging discussion of politics and society in monarchic Iraq. The author's analysis of Yasin al-Hashimi's role in instigating the 1935 revolt was a major source for Chapter

Three. Interviews with some of the key protagonists and access to unique archival material buttressed her conclusions.

News Sources

Foreign Broadcast Information Service (FBIS)

The Iraq Times

The New York Times

The Washington Post

Websites

Assyrian International News Agency, www.aina.org

Bet-Nahrain, www.bet-nahrain.com

Islamic Dawa Party, www.islamicdawaparty.org

Kurdistan Democratic Party, www.kdp.pp.se

Nineveh, www.nineveh.org

Washington Institute for Near East Policy, www.washingtoninstitute.org